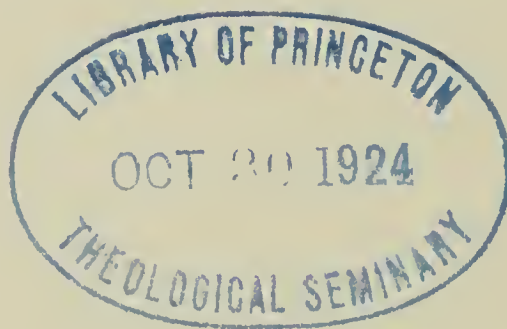


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# THE RELIGION OF LOWER RACES

*As Illustrated by the*

AFRICAN BANTU

# THE WORLD'S LIVING RELIGIONS

EDITED BY  
FRANK KNIGHT SANDERS  
AND  
HARLAN PAGE BEACH

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A series of concise yet reliable presentations of the actual religious life of the non-Christian peoples of today and of Christianity's approach to them

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CHRISTIANITY AND THE WORLD RELIGIONS

# THE RELIGION OF LOWER RACES

*As Illustrated by the*  
AFRICAN BANTU

BY  
EDWIN W. SMITH

*Sometime missionary in Northern Rhodesia; author of "A Handbook of the Ila Language," etc.; chief-translator of the Ila New Testament; co-author of "The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia"; Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain.*

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## PREFACE

This little volume is one of a series on "The World's Living Religions," projected in 1920 by a committee of the Board of Missionary Preparation of North America, and intended to furnish accurate and trustworthy, though brief and popular presentations of the actual religious life of each great region of the non-Christian world. Its purpose is to give to students of religion in the West and particularly to missionary candidates who are planning to go to Africa, or to other portions of the world where primitive peoples are living, and to all who are interested to know such peoples more intimately, a vivid conception of the religious conditions which exist in such an area and some understanding of the hold of the prevailing religion upon those who follow it.

In a true sense these books seek to enable a reader to think in terms of a devotee of a strange religion, to appreciate his point of view with some sympathy, and thus become able to consider his religious problems helpfully. The series aims to be impressionistic rather than educational, and to afford a clear picture of the religion in question as it works out in its normal social setting. The editors have not sought to provide a thoroughly scientific discussion of each religion. For such an approach the literature referred to in the Appendix makes ample provision.

The writer of this volume was for seventeen years a missionary of the Primitive Methodist Church in Africa

and spent most of that time as a pioneer in Northern Rhodesia. He reduced the Ila language to writing, prepared its grammar and dictionary, translated most of the New Testament into a popular version and wrote books for Ila use in the schools. With a colleague, A. M. Dale, he has published an exhaustive study of the Ila-speaking Bantu peoples, already recognized as a contribution of great value. Born in South Africa, the son of a missionary, his life-long study of the Bantu peoples has amply qualified him by a rich experience to interpret their social and religious life. In his judgment the readers of this series will best be served by a clear and adequate exhibit of the religious life of one group of peoples of lower religious culture in preference to a general study of folk religion. With this judgment the editors are in full sympathy.

There are good reasons for choosing the African Bantu to represent the other peoples of a similar grade of culture. Among these reasons is the importance of Africa as a mission field. European politicians have long recognized the strategic character of that continent from their point of view. The economic value of the land that was once regarded as chiefly desert is more and more realized today. Nor in the politics of the Kingdom of God is Africa of any less importance. It may be that the final conflict between the Cross and the Crescent will be determined there. Certainly the struggle will be a hard one. From every point of view it is of the highest import that the pagan Bantu of Central and Southern Africa should be Christianized before Mohammedan propaganda spreads further. Hence the importance of thoroughly knowing the religious ideas of these peoples and of being able to approach them on the right lines. Moslem missionaries have a great advantage over Christian missionaries in be-

ing culturally nearer the people whom they seek to convert. To bridge the gulf between the graduate of a Western university and the pagan African is no easy matter; it cannot be bridged at all unless those who are trained amidst Christian surroundings make a strong and sympathetic effort to understand the African point of view in the matters that most concern them and him. Hence the emphasis which we would put upon the necessity of an introduction of this sort to Bantu religious ideas.

It is true beyond cavil that the area covered by the Bantu-speaking peoples presents a wide variation in cultural features,—customs, habits, manufactures and beliefs,—yet there is, nevertheless, a fair basis for an interpretation (such as this volume offers) which aims to state what is generally true. The Bantu peoples do form a reasonably distinctive group, yet they also represent the average negro type. As they live, act, think and worship, so in the main do other primitive peoples in Africa.

The round of religious ideas and practices which the Bantu exhibit finds many parallels among primitive peoples everywhere. Another volume of the series will treat specifically the religious ideas of such peoples in South-eastern Asia, yet one who is going among primitive people anywhere will find this volume of great assistance in the task of understanding them.

It is our hope that this uniquely fresh contribution to the understanding of the present day religion of primitive people in Africa may be found helpful to a large circle of readers.

THE EDITORS.

*New York City*  
*March, 1923*



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# **THE RELIGION OF LOWER RACES**



# THE RELIGION OF LOWER RACES

*As Illustrated by the*  
AFRICAN BANTU

## I

### INTRODUCTORY

The writer was once on a visit to a Bantu chief in Africa who long had been unfriendly to the Mission, but who that day showed unmistakable signs of a changing attitude. When he arose to leave, the chief insisted upon accompanying him a part of the way. As they walked along side by side, he felt the chief insinuating something into his hand. Glancing around to see that they were not observed the chief said: "Do not look at this now, but wear it always." "What is it?" the missionary asked. "It is a very powerful and very precious talisman, the secret of which cost me ten cows," the chief replied. "It will ensure that everybody with whom you come into contact will love you!" The gift was accepted in the spirit in which it was offered and with warm thanks. On later examination the talisman was found to be a bracelet composed of a roll of snakeskin enclosing varied drugs.

Now one may ask: What has this to do with religion? There are plenty of people in America and Europe, good Christians, too, who will wear a lucky-token on their

watch chain, or avoid the number thirteen, or knock on wood, but we do not call these acts of religion. Were an African to write of our religion and devote one chapter to "The God Luck," we should be offended. These things belong to the same cycle of ideas as the charms of the savage; with us, however, they are a mere relic of a former system of belief, a "survival," a superstition. In Africa today they do not represent mere superstition; they are part and parcel of the faith by which people live and by which they act.

Religion, in its lowest as in its highest forms, begins in an act of trust. Faith is essential to it, faith in the existence and working of supersensible power, faith which springs from the pressure of human needs, faith which moulds and shapes as well the life of the individual as that of the social organism. The African has a more complete trust in what lies behind his charms than many of us have in the providence of God. Faith in that power which works in and through an amulet or a talisman may be a low form of faith, but it is faith. The one who seeks to come into helpful religious relationship or even contact with people must not treat this trust as a superstition to be ignored or condemned. It is rather a pathway along which may come the realization of a higher form of faith.

The Bantu of Africa are a human unit in this elementary stage of religious development. A study of their religious ideas will not only serve to exhibit the religious experience of the negro, but will also illustrate the general characteristics of the religious life of all peoples of the lower culture.

### 1. *The Wide Distribution of Elementary Religion*

A large section of the human race is still in an elementary stage of development religiously or else it re-

tains elements of an earlier cult in connection with its own present more stately worship. The native peoples of Africa, of the island world, of Northern Asia, of secluded portions of India and of the aboriginal American continent still retain the religious impress of primitive areas. Millions of the followers of Buddha, of Mohammed, of Confucius and of the officially recognized gods of India cherish practices which are but survivals of those of an earlier time, before their ancestors adopted these more highly organized religious cults. Even Christianity, as we know it, reveals traces of such survivals.

## *2. The Bantu Religion an Adequate Exhibit*

In the great historical and flourishing religions of to-day these survivals are ignored as matters of purely private interest or concern, or else are regarded as superstitions unworthy of attention. To gain a clear sight of elementary religious ideas in full control of life one must turn to undeveloped peoples like the negroes of Africa. Of these the Bantu afford a typical religious exhibit, since they represent the African at his best.

It is no easy task to produce a satisfying survey of Bantu religion. Of very few tribes is there available any adequate first-hand description; of most of them scarcely anything is really known. The information available is scattered through many books and articles written by missionaries, government officials and travelers. The account of the salient features of Bantu religion that follows will serve as a starting point for further study. It is quite possible that the writer's long experience with a few particular tribes has, in some points, led him astray in attempting a composite picture. It need only be said that he has been aware of the possibility and has tried to avoid it, giving to the best of his knowledge and belief a

true account of the religion as a whole. In order to give a proper setting to this picture it will be necessary first to note a few facts regarding the Bantu peoples and their history.

## II

### THE BANTU PEOPLES OF AFRICA

The word "Bantu" simply means "people" or "the people." It applies to a negroid people divided into many groups, numbering about fifty millions. If one should draw a line diagonally across the map of Africa from the mouth of the Rio-del-Rey in the Gulf of Guinea to the mouth of the Tana River on the east coast, slightly below the equator, the territory of the Bantu would be south of the line. The Bantu differ from the true negroes found north of this line, in that they have a strain of Hamitic (and probably of Elamitic) blood in their veins.

#### 1. *The Origin of the Bantu*

In ancient times Bantu Africa was in all probability inhabited by black peoples of a lower type; in the distant south, beyond the Zambesi River, lived nomadic Bushmen. Not far from the third or fourth century B. C., let us say about the time of Camillus, the founder of historic Rome, of Demosthenes, of Cyrus and of Nehemiah, the ancestors of the Bantu swept south from their original home, somewhere in the neighborhood of the great equatorial lakes,<sup>1</sup> overrunning in the course of centuries the

<sup>1</sup> Johnston now holds that these lakes (or the Bahr-al-Ghazal) were a secondary focus of distribution for the Bantu, its earliest area of development being in Eastern Nigeria. *Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*, Vol. II, pp. xii, 14.

southern part of the continent, except the southwest corner, where the Hottentots and Bushmen continued to live. They took with them cattle, domestic fowls and implements of iron, and either exterminated, or more generally absorbed, the previous inhabitants. While the modern Bantu have much in common, they are not homogeneous either in culture or in physical appearance. This fact must be accounted for by the varying degrees of their mixture with the aboriginals and by the influence of diverse climatic conditions. Their languages, however, over three hundred of which are known, constitute a clearly marked family of speech, while there is a sufficient likeness of religious ideas to make possible and to justify such a sketch as the following.

## 2. *Their Social Organization and Culture*

In order to show the quality of the Bantu peoples, it will be well to give a brief account of their industrial and social life.<sup>1</sup> The Bantu are not savages. Wherever the country is adapted to the purpose, they possess great herds of cattle and are agriculturists. Their staple foods in the east country are milk and millet and maize; and, in the west, yams, plantains and manioc (cassava). Their general type of dwelling is the cylindrical hut with a conical roof of grass; in the southeast one finds bee-hive huts and in the west rectangular buildings with ridged roofs. Iron is worked almost universally by them, and copper too, where it exists. The art of preparing bark-fibre cloth is practiced by many tribes, while wood-carving and basketry are very general. They have no interest or skill in working with stone. They represent a fine average negro type.

<sup>1</sup> For a very complete and fascinating study of a Bantu group, the Ba-ila of Northern Rhodesia, see Smith and Dale's *The Ila-Speaking Peoples, etc.* (Bibliography No. 20).

The social organization varies to some extent with the climatic conditions. Almost everywhere the social unit is the village, made up of families and ruled by a headman, a number of villages forming a group ruled by a chief. In the open country where communication is easy, nations have sprung into existence under kings. In the historic past extensive, even if ephemeral, "empires" have been formed by such conquering chiefs as Msidi, Chaka and Sebitwane. Most of the Bantu tribes show some trace of totemism; that is to say, they are or were at one time divided into clans, each bearing the name of some animal, plant or object, such as the "Elephants," the "Grasshoppers" or the "Baobabs." The Prime Minister of Uganda, we are told, is a "Grasshopper" and uses a seal with the legend "Always forward." The members of a clan are united by close ties of comradeship. Marriage within the clan is not allowed, i.e., an Elephant must not marry an Elephant. The clan name descends in general through the mother, not the father.<sup>1</sup> These are original features of totemism, which, however, are now rarely found in their purity. But generally throughout Africa the clan pays great respect to its totem, i.e., the animal or other object from which it takes its name. Totemism is often treated as a religion, sometimes as if it were the most primitive form of religion, but in Africa today it has hardly any, if any, religious significance; its importance is wholly social.

### *3. The Spirit in Which the Race Should Be Studied*

Before proceeding further, let us stop a moment and try to bring these peoples before our mental vision. Travel

<sup>1</sup> All clans were matrilineal originally. There are some, however, which have become patrilineal. In these marriage within the clan is regarded as desirable, only surpassed by marriage into the mother's clan.

in imagination up the great rivers, through the dense forests, over the wide undulating savannahs. Try to catch some of the notes of the still sad music of Africa's humanity. Fifty millions of people, living and dying! They have black or chocolate skins; in many respects they are separated from ourselves by vast chasms; but they are human, composed of flesh and blood and soul as we are. If you prick them they bleed; if you tickle them they laugh, as we do. Grief and joy touch the same chords of their hearts as of our own. In their veins surge our own pitiful passions. They, with us, have pondered the dark enigmas of human life, the mystery of the great universe around, and they, too, have been disturbed by a sense of something interfused,

“Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns  
And the round ocean and the living air.”

In the course of this study we shall meet with much that may seem revolting because of its foolishness, cruelty and degradation, but let us go on in the spirit of sympathy, remembering that we are all pupils in God's great school and that if, by His grace, we are in the higher class, it is not for us to despise those who are in the kindergarten.

### III

## THE BASIS OF FAITH IN BANTU RELIGION

### 1. *They Believe in a Universal Energy*

The anecdote related in the opening paragraph shows clearly one type of faith which the Bantu possess. When we think ourselves back into their minds we realize that, while they recognize a more or less personal Supreme Being and recognize, too, personal spiritual beings of a lower grade, they expend a very large proportion of their religious feeling on a power that is impersonal. One of the technical names given to their belief is dynamism, the belief in an Energy or Potence which is immanent in all things, something as intangible and all-pervasive as the ether. It is everywhere, it flows through all things, but it draws itself to a node or focus in certain conspicuous objects. In itself it has no moral quality, but it can be tapped and turned to good use or bad according to the intention of the user. Not everybody, however, can manipulate it; its use must be fenced in by many precautions, for it is dangerous, just as electricity may be dangerous to those who do not understand how to use it. It is akin to the Mana of the Melanesians and other Pacific islanders, the Orenda and Watan of the red Indians.

In trying to understand this conception which seems to underlie all Bantu belief and practice, it is helpful to recall the modern doctrine of energy as one of the fundamental physical existences. In one of its potential forms

energy lies dormant in all matter, associated with its ultimate atoms, and giving no indication of its presence. Not only is it, as everybody knows, in coal and guncotton, it lies hidden also in the very paving stones of our streets. It is boundless and inexhaustible, if only we knew how to harness it to our needs,—knew how, that is to say, to transform potential into kinetic energy, the energy of burning coal, or of the electric charge, or of moving electrons.

Thoughtful Bantu would echo Carlyle,—who when he said “force” meant “energy”: “Force, Force, everywhere Force! We ourselves a mysterious Force. . . .” They too see in all things a kind of potential energy, which becomes kinetic or active in the talismans and amulets to which they commit their fate.

It would not do to say that any African to whom one talks would be able to express his belief in such words as the above. The African feels rather than formulates. He has not expressed his belief in set terms; it lies implicit in all his doings, yet probably he could not give a name for the Potence. He does not, in a word, make a creed of his belief in this energy; he acts upon it. His religion consists very largely in getting this power to work for his benefit and in avoiding that which would bring him into violent and harmful contact with it.

## *2. The Secret of Its Manipulation*

The most important individuals in the Bantu community are the doctors and the diviners because they are believed to hold the secret of harnessing this mysterious energy. They have to pass through a ritual of initiation before they can practice, a training which is often long and severe. The doctor must learn the secret of the plants and other objects in which, so to speak, the all-pervasive

energy has come to a head for the curing of disease or for the making of amulets and talismans. He learns darker mysteries, too,—the drugs in which the power is present to blight and to destroy. The diviner seeks to discover or learn how the secrets of nature may be employed for the discovery of human secrets, in order that he may detect thieves, warlocks,<sup>1</sup> witches and other criminals.

### 3. *Its Application to Actual Life*

In countless ways this energy is applied to the needs of every-day life.

(a) *In Medicinal Remedies.*—Undoubtedly the Bantu have learned many secrets of nature. The doctors know the therapeutic qualities of many plants; they know emetics, for example, and they know poisons. They believe they know more than they really do know. They have discovered the power that lies in what we call “suggestion.” You would laugh at many of their supposed remedies; some of their concoctions are as repulsive as the witches’ broth of which we read in “Macbeth.” You would feel inclined to say to them: It is ridiculous to think that such things can work the wondrous effects you imagine! Their reply might be: Yes, the thing itself appears absurd, but the essence of it is a particular manifestation of the world-energy, and that essence performs the wonders.

(b) *In Charms Which Give Luck.*—What has just been said applies particularly to the charms which the doctor makes and sells to his patients. They are of two kinds: talismans which bring good luck and transmit qualities; and amulets which ward off ills of various kinds. They are all treated very seriously. The faith reposed in them is absolute. As used they constitute a

<sup>1</sup> An archaic word, again coming into use to designate a male sorcerer.

system of insurance. Instead of taking out an insurance policy against the risk of having his hut destroyed by lightning, for example, a man will buy an amulet for this purpose from the doctor. Charms are worn upon the person; they are suspended from the roof in the house or hung up outside; they are attached to tools and instruments. The writer has been asked many times to give men a charm for their guns, so that they might always shoot straight; others have begged him for a charm for their eyes so that they might be able to read books, for they have a firm conviction that skill is derived from talismans. When they put iron ore into their smelting-kilns they must add a charm, for without it no iron would be forthcoming, however hot the furnace might be. One charm will keep off witchcraft; another will turn people back who are on the way to kill you. Others will make you invisible to the foe in battle; others will render you impervious to his spears. There is a useful talisman which makes your accuser in the law-court forget the charge that he intended to bring against you, and another which both stimulates your own wits so that you put your case convincingly and makes your opponents stupid so that they lose their action. One charm will turn you into a wild beast when you die; another will transform you into a destructive ghost, so that you may come back and haunt those who were unkind to you in this life. In short, there are charms to meet almost every conceivable condition or desire.

(c) *In Fetishes with Their Reputed Spiritual Power.*—What we have been considering is dynamism, the belief in a mysterious hidden impersonal force which can be tapped and put to the use of men. Nowhere has it been stated that these charms convey the power of supernatural beings. If anything like a spirit has to do with the value

of the charm, the name given to the practice is no longer dynamism but fetishism, which has been defined as "the doctrine of spirits embodied in or attached to, or conveying influence through, certain material objects." Fetishism is found in certain parts of Africa,—in the Congo territory and in Uganda, for example. The people there have the usual charms already described, but they also have other kinds with which spirits, mostly the spirits of the departed, are associated. There may be little outwardly to distinguish fetishes from charms; but a fetish is a charm with a plus, and the plus is the spirit attached to it.<sup>1</sup> Whether the spirit dwells within the fetish, or only is attached to it in some way, is not always clear; but certainly the fetish would lose most, if not all its power, were the spirit to leave it. The fetish in West Africa often takes the form of a hideous carved wooden image. When a warrior is away on a campaign it is his wife's duty to offer prayers and beer to the fetish in the house in order to keep the spirit in a good temper. Should the warrior be killed or wounded in battle, everybody would be convinced that the woman had not done her duty and that the spirit had withdrawn his power from the protecting fetish in consequence, and she would be held responsible for her husband's mishap. In Uganda some fetishes have temples erected for them, each with its attendant priest and a medium through whom the spirit attached to the fetish makes his will known to the people. Some fetishes have a woman in attendance who is regarded as the wife of the spirit. A former king of Uganda had a great fetish which lived in a temple where malefactors were taken to be tried; none of them ever returned alive, for the fetish-

<sup>1</sup> Others regard all spirits as personal. The distinction they draw between charms and fetishes is that the former are instinct with the spirit of things and the latter with disembodied human spirits. [Ed.]

ghost speaking through his medium invariably condemned them; they were slain there kneeling before the fetish and the report would be spread that they died of fright on being convicted by the fetish.

(d) *In the Practice of Witchcraft.*—Witchcraft, the darkest terror of the African's life, is intimately associated with his belief in dynamism, for it is in virtue of the mysterious power manifest in drugs that the witch and warlock act, or are supposed to act. The drugs which they get from the doctors bestow upon them a kind of directive energy,—the Ba-ila name it *inzuikizhi*,—which enables them to act upon people over a distance. They work in various ways. The simplest act of bewitchery is to point with the index finger in the direction of a person while thinking, or mumbling, a desire for his death. Christian preachers have sometimes got themselves into fearful trouble by innocently emphasizing some point in their sermon by shaking an index finger in the face of the congregation. They have been charged with bewitching their hearers! Another way is to stab the footprint of a person; the victim will be found bleeding to death. Or some hair or nail-clippings which get into the warlock's possession give him the necessary hold upon the person. Or, having marked out his victim, the warlock contrives to get some third person to give him food. This may be some ordinary article of diet, but, when it is swallowed, it becomes a snake or a beetle in the throat or stomach of the victim. It is not necessary even to do this; the warlock, while eating at home, may simply direct his occult power in his enemy's direction and, if he too is eating at the same moment, his food will make him ill. The witch can send a crocodile or lion or snake to attack her victim or she can turn herself into one of those animals and do the deed herself. She may obtain human flesh,

boil it, mix some herbs with the gravy and sprinkle it in the field of the man whom she wishes to kill; then all who partake of the grain growing in the field will die. Moreover, witches and warlocks have the weird power of un-sheathing their personality. Leaving their body lying on the bed at home, they wander off in the night, enter some person's house through the roof and consume his vitality, so that while he may appear to be alive for a few days longer, he has really ceased to exist and very shortly afterwards dies in earnest. Such a person often becomes the warlock's familiar; that is to say, in the ghostly state he is in the service of the warlock who sends him on embassies of death and destruction. The familiar may go in the form of a little sprite,—or the warlock himself assumes this form,—enters through the roof and sits on a beam, where it gibbers and chirps, to the terror of the person lying in the room who often dies of fright or goes mad.

Witches and wizards, naturally, do not perform their devil tricks in the open, but in secret; indeed some peoples in Africa believe that the warlock is not conscious of his own doings but performs them, as it were, in his sleep. It becomes necessary, therefore, to take measures to discover them and put a stop to their crimes. In some parts of Africa it was the custom, and perhaps still is, to have a periodical cleaning-up. Picture the scene,—under the tropical stars, in a village surrounded by dense forest whence comes at intervals the cry of some wandering wild beast. The people are all assembled. They pass in file, one by one, before the doctor who administers to each a portion of some horrible brew. It is done with intense solemnity, under conditions calculated to impress the minds of all. Indeed some are overpowered and scream out a confession of witchcraft before ever passing the doc-

tor. The "medicine," which all are required to take, is supposed to intoxicate only those who are mixed up with witchcraft. Presently here and there in the crowd a man or woman is observed whose legs totter or whose head wobbles, and they are borne off to death amid loud acclamation.

Of course, people are on the watch in every community for suspicious characters. Whenever any one dies in an unaccountable manner, some unfortunate person is sure to be accused of causing his death. Indeed, it is a widespread belief in Africa that nobody dies what we call a natural death; all such deaths are due to witchcraft. Suspected persons are haled before the diviner, who by virtue of occult powers acquired through drugs, is able, by many methods, to detect the guilty one. If there is any doubt about it, the suspect will be forced to go through the ordeal, or will himself volunteer to go through it. He will have to pick stones out of a big pot of boiling water; and if his arm shows any sign of blistering he will be held guilty. Or he will be made to swallow a kind of poison. If he dies under it, or if it purges him, he is guilty; if he vomits or shows no sign, he is pronounced innocent. Warlocks and witches of this description are shown no mercy, for theirs is the most heinous crime known to the African. It is the crime of murder or, at least, of causing sickness and misfortune out of malice. Civilized governments, acting on the belief that there is no such thing as witchcraft, do their utmost to put down the practice of tracing and punishing witches. To the African this is the sheerest of follies. It is as if one were to decree that murderers, or at any rate some murderers, were not to be sought out and condemned. We cannot wonder that, believing as they do, Africans treat witches and warlocks so cruelly. They are clubbed, or hanged, or impaled,

or drowned, or flayed while still conscious and cut up into pieces and burnt, or, while alive, they are laid on a pile of wood and burnt to death, or they are pegged down in the path of the warrior-ants which torment, kill and leave the bones white in the sun.

All this has been narrated as matter of fact and as if there were no supposition about it. To the Bantu there is no supposition. They are as convinced that the witch and warlock work in the ways described as we are convinced about our own existence. The conviction colors their whole life. Just try to imagine what life must be under such conditions! Where any unoffending person may at any time be accused of causing sickness and death, where every one suspects his fellow, and where all live in such incessant fear of unknown enemies, life, one would think, is hardly worth living. The diviners are often rascals who for gain or to maintain their prestige denounce people who never had the slightest wish to dabble in the occult. Dr. Bentley tells of a woman witch who on retiring from business confessed that she had denounced two hundred people, the majority of whom she knew to have been innocent. Myriads of innocent persons have been hurried to a shameful and cruel death. Millions of people have lived beneath the shadow of this terrible belief for centuries. It is a greater curse to Africa than ever the slave-trade was. Who can measure its baneful effect in preventing the progress of the Bantu? Men simply do not dare to be more industrious and to accumulate more wealth than their fellows; they dare not show great skill; they do not venture out upon new paths of progress, for fear they will be condemned by public opinion of being concerned with witchcraft.

(e) *In the Tabu Which Forbids.*—Another thing in the life of the Bantu, intimately associated with dynamism,

is the extensive system of tabu which regulates individual and social conduct. Sometimes in our streets and factories we see a prominently displayed notice:

DEATH!!!

DO NOT TOUCH THIS WIRE!!!

That is what the Bantu mean when they forbid the doing or saying of certain things; they are issuing a danger signal; they are labeling the deeds and words as dangerous, tabu. We do not mean that every prohibition is to be classed as a tabu. The Bantu have a host of laws, the infringement of which is punished by the chief and elders of the village. The peculiarity of a true tabu is that the offender is not punished by his fellows; the evil consequence follows the act as inevitably as a shock follows upon touching a live wire. By doing certain things or by saying certain words, a man presses the trigger which releases the hidden mysterious energies of which we have previously spoken, and they at once react against him. It is not easy for a civilized person to realize the tremendous part that tabu plays in the life of the Bantu. From the cradle to the grave they are hedged round by "dont's." The prohibitions comprise not only many things that we ourselves recognize to be contrary to the moral law, but also, and much more, many things that to us seem to have nothing to do with ethics. We, for example, are not guided by conscience in matters of food; some things disgust us, other things make us ill, others are not according to our taste, hence we refrain from eating them; but we do not consider our action as a matter of right and wrong. We have learned the Master's lesson that there is nothing from without the man that going into him can defile him—that is to say, is tabu—but the things

which proceed out of the man are those that defile him; "this He said making all meats clean." It is different with the Bantu. It is tabu to eat this and tabu to eat that; if you eat you will inevitably suffer. Some of these tabus are ordered by the doctor; he may prohibit something to a child who thereafter, either for life or until he grows up, may not eat the thing named. One child, for example, may not eat hippopotamus flesh; if he eats it, he will become a leper. Another may not eat the great ezunda frog, or his eyes would swell and become big like the frog's. Likewise there are tabus applicable only to women. Girls and young married women may not eat the hare, the porcupine and the monkey; should they break this rule their children would be like those animals. It would be unprofitable to enumerate all the things, other than foods, that may be tabu; the point to remember is that by eating certain things, by saying certain words, by doing certain actions, a man may liberate the mysterious world-energy surrounding him with fatal consequences to himself and to his neighbors. Persons in certain conditions, and things put to certain uses, thereby come into intimate contact with this unknown power and are therefore in a state of tabu. It is as if at certain times the separating medium between it and men become attenuated,—the insulating rubber, so to speak, gets worn off the live wire,—and people then enter into intimate relation with its mysterious working. Death is the great cause that brings men into this dangerous position and therefore mourners, widows, widowers, warriors home from battle, are all in a state of tabu. As such they have to go through elaborate rites of purification, before they can resume their normal life in the community.

(f) *These Practices do not Lack Moral Value.*—This all very well illustrates the distinction we are accustomed

to draw between a moral and a ceremonial law; and it is a sign of weakness in ethical discrimination on the part of the Bantu when they rate a breach of ceremonial a greater offence than a breach of the moral law. They so often call a thing bad that really has no ethical quality at all, while many actions that are really bad they pass over with little or no censure. At the same time it must be recognized that this tabu-belief has been a good training and preparation for the time when the Bantu should have the higher morality taught them. We may call it morality of a low grade, but it is better than none. Many of the actions that the highest ethics condemns are condemned by the tabu-morality, not for the same reasons, not for the best reasons, but still condemned. Incest is tabu, some kinds of homicide are tabu, suicide is tabu. These offences may be committed very largely within a tribe, but the people believe they cannot be committed with impunity. Among many Bantu tribes, for example, if a man kills his mother, although he is not brought before the chief and sentenced to capital punishment he does not escape; his penalty is more awful than any human tribunal can inflict. That mysterious underlying world-energy reacts against him in the form of a curse. To Anglo-Saxons a curse is little more than "words, words, words" that cannot have any serious effect upon one; the Bantu believe that a curse is charged with some of the mysterious potency of which we have spoken, and especially the curse pronounced by a near relation. Nor is it necessary that a curse be declared; if one does anything to a parent that might call down his or her curse, the consequences will follow. The matricide is never safe; go where he will, do what he may, vengeance dogs his steps and on any day may overtake him; sooner or later he will come to a miserable end.

So then this belief is not without some considerable influence for good upon the people. We may hardly like to call dynamism a religion, but it certainly is a belief that makes for righteousness in some directions.

## IV

### THE COMPLEX CONCEPTION OF PERSONALITY

Let us now advance another step in our study, from dynamism to animism, from forces affecting a man from without to those which develop within himself. In order that what follows may be intelligible, we must first consider the ideas of the Bantu in regard to the human soul. The Bantu believe not only in the mysterious impersonal potency with which we have been dealing hitherto; they believe in psychic beings, intelligent, purposeful, personal powers, that may be associated for a time with material things, yet have a distinct and separate life of their own. This is animism. The Bantu seem to think that in man both this potency and these powers are in operation; hence their conception of the human personality is a very complex one. The subject is a very difficult one to make clear, but perhaps some aspects of it may be set forth in the limited space available.

#### 1. *The Vital Principle Exists Apart from the Body*

(a) *It is Transmissible.*—Let us begin with the fact that the Zulus and other Bantu eat the flesh of long-lived animals in order that they themselves may live longer. Evidently the world-energy assumes the form of longevity in those animals and by consuming their flesh men can transfer that energy to themselves. It is only a step from that to eating the flesh of men in order to assimilate the

world-energy which takes the form of strength and valor in them. We are here at the root of the cannibalism practiced by so many Bantu tribes. In many other tribes where cannibalism is not the general custom, and where it may even be regarded with the utmost horror, warriors nevertheless, will, as part of the ritual of victory, eat the heart and liver and other organs of a brave enemy slain in battle in order to absorb his courage, wisdom and perseverance. In fact, the flesh and blood of an enemy killed in battle make the most efficacious of all charms, one that is put to a great many uses:—seed is smeared with it to ensure a good harvest, hunters inoculate themselves with it to give them skill, and so on.

(b) *It is Focussed in Various Organs.*—In the liver the vital principle is found as patience, in the spleen as hatred, in the heart as intellect and will, in the chest as intelligence and eloquence, in the diaphragm as conscience. The Bantu to a large extent personalize these organs: “My heart leads me,” they say; “My chest told me.” They often ascribe what we should call the vital processes to curious quasi-personal creatures that are supposed to live in the organs. In the ear there is one whose function is to hear and secrete wax; in the bony protuberance behind the ear there is another associated with taste; and some Bantu account for the processes of reproduction by the working of similar creatures. They receive personal names and are spoken of as if they were self-acting individuals.

(c) *It is Separable.*—Many of the Bantu believe that the vital principle can be removed from the body and placed for safety in some secure spot. A man will go to a doctor and tell him that he is anxious thus to safeguard his life. The doctor will, in return for a handsome fee, apply to him a very powerful charm which will abstract

his life and put it, say, in a palm tree or in another man's eye,—wherever the patient may wish. Henceforth a very close connection subsists between the two. Should the palm tree fall, or should the other man have his eye destroyed, at the same instant the man would die. Should, on the other hand, another person, by virtue of some more powerful charm, succeed in killing the man, at the same moment the palm would fall or the other man's eye would burst, and people would thus discover what they did not know before, where the man's life had been hid. Among some tribes a cultivated plant of some kind is planted behind the house when a child is born, and thenceforth carefully tended, for it is believed that were it to wither away the child would die. These are instances of what has been named "the external soul."

## 2. *A Murdered Man and Certain Slain Animals Have an Aura or "Nuru"*

Many of the Bantu believe that there is another element in man; the Ba-thonga name it the *nuru*. It is a kind of aura or influence that emanates from the body of a murdered man and also from the corpses of certain large animals such as the eland. It may remain attached for a long time to the skull of a man who was murdered and never buried. The murderer, the hunter, the warrior, or he who interferes with the skull, may, unless he is promptly medicated with drugs by the doctor, be driven into insanity by the *nuru*. This is not the ghost of the man or animal; it is something else that lies dormant in the living person and remains with the corpse.

## 3. *One's Name Is a Part of His Being*

We are coming to see that the constitution of man is, in the opinion of the Bantu, very complex. And we must

not omit to notice that they regard a person's name as also a part of his personality. The name is not a mere label. If one asks an unsophisticated native to give his name, he will look very confused and will either turn to some bystander and ask him to reply, or he will make up a fictitious name, or he will repeat one of his nicknames which have not the sacred character that his real name has. It is tabu for him to pronounce his name. Neither a person nor a thing is precisely the same without a name as with it. We do not err if we say that the name is part of the man's personality. This is an idea quite foreign to westerners, but we can easily understand how the untutored Bantu reach this conclusion. When you pronounce a name what happens? You produce a sound; in other words, vibrations which impinge upon the eardrum of another; it is as if something has gone out from you which enters into another person. The Bantu know nothing about air-waves, but they are sure that when they utter their name something goes out from themselves that is an intimate part of themselves,—some part of their life. When you have their name, you have them. There is a little animal in Africa which some name Chinao; they also call it "that-which-may-not-be-named-by-children." It is said to be subject to periodical fits. If one names it in a child's presence, or if the child names it, the name, so the people say, enters the child and makes it epileptic, just as the animal is itself epileptic. From the point of view of the Chinao, one might say that the child robs it of something by the act of uttering its name. Similarly, if a person mentions his true name, he gives away a part of himself. An evilly disposed person can use the name, which is part of him, to the detriment of the whole of him, just as getting hold of a lock of some one's hair enables an enemy to bewitch him by means of it.

#### 4. *The Dead Often Return to Be Reborn*

The belief of the Bantu in reincarnation is intimately associated with their belief as to names, for the real name which a man bears is the name of the ancestor who is reborn in him, a part of the personality that survives many deaths and returns to the earth in many generations. When a child is born in the home the parents are naturally anxious to ascertain which of the forebears it is who has returned to this world. They bring in the diviner who says over the names of the various ancestors and divines from the child's demeanor which of them the child is; that is to say, the person reborn recognizes his own name and on hearing it gives a sign; naturally, therefore, the child is given the name it bore in a previous sojourn upon earth; and how many soever nicknames he may come to have later in life, this is the real sacred name, part of that ego which persists from generation to generation.

#### 5. *Even One's Shadow Belongs to His Personality*

We have already seen how the warlock and witch are supposed to have the strange power of going out of themselves in order to plague others and how they can also rob a person of his vital essence. It is not only the Bantu magicians who have this last-named power; the foreigner armed with his camera also appears to the unsophisticated African as desirous of making off with some part of him. If one wants to take a photograph of a child, the parents will very likely object strongly. No, they will say, it will take away the child's shadow, so that he will die. And when you show them pictures of people, dead or alive, on the lantern screen, they are much perturbed, and you may hear them say: "Yes, we knew that he had put their shadows in his box; see, here they are again!"

A story is told of a magician who used to exhibit his occult powers by telling women to place a big wooden mortar on his chest and to pound grain in it while he slept; the heavy thumping made no impression upon him; he went on sleeping calmly. On another day, one of the women unintentionally hit his shadow with her pestle and the magician at once awoke with a loud cry; he had all the time been out of his body in his shadow. Many Bantu dislike having any one tread on their shadow or to have their shadow speared. Children are warned not to allow the fire to cast their shadow upon the wall of the house, lest they should die from having seen themselves as a shadow.

The Bantu, then, it is evident, attach great importance to the shadow of a person. Do they actually believe that the shadow is a part of themselves? The writer has heard natives strongly deny it, while maintaining some of the prohibitions already alluded to. It would seem rather that they think of the soul as a shadow, because it is as elusive as a shadow, just as they speak of it sometimes as "breath" and "wind," because it is as intangible and mysterious as these. Many people believe that in the Bantu conception a person has two or three or more souls. It may be that this is the correct view to take; but it will be sufficient for us here to view these four elements of personality,—the vital principle, the *nuru*, the name and the shadow,—as phases of that inner mysterious life which they recognize, but which they, no more than ourselves, have yet come to understand.

The time inevitably arrives when this mysterious personality of ours undergoes a change. Death comes and separates the material body from the spiritual; the body decays, but the man himself survives. That death is not the end of all is the firm belief of the Bantu.

## V

### THE SURVIVAL OF THE PERSONALITY

The funeral customs of the Bantu make it clear that they, like us, assume that personality continues after death.

#### 1. *A Funeral in Pagan Africa*

No one who has attended a funeral in heathen Africa will ever forget it. It is one of the saddest, most pathetic scenes on earth. The corpse, with some exceptions, is buried either in the hut, or in the cattle-kraal or out in the forest away from the village. Some corpses are eaten, some are burnt, some are cast to the wild beasts; but interment in the soil is the general rule among the Bantu. The body is often elaborately anointed and clothed. Among some tribes it is embalmed and kept for a long time before being buried, but generally the burial follows quickly upon death. Crowds of people flock to the funeral, the men dressed as for war. The real mourners are very sincere and demonstrative in their grief; as long as the mourning ceremonies last they neither wash nor shave, they wear old tattered rags and present a most miserable appearance. The writer recalls the figure made by one of his friends, an important chief, at the funeral of a relative. He was coated from head to foot with white ashes and wore the scantiest bit of cloth around his loins, With a broken stick in one hand and a wildebeest tail,

containing "medicine," in the other, he was wandering about disconsolately alone. As he stood, with his long thin shanks and wizened body, gesticulating with the tail and shouting as if expostulating with death, he presented a most pathetic figure. Every now and then he would flop down, wallow in the dust and throw ashes over himself. When after a time he came over to speak to me, the old man was quite exhausted. At the same time there were three old women sitting together, the picture of grief, their arms around each other. A son, a lad of fourteen, was lying on an ash heap, his body shaking with sobs. On the grave four of the deceased man's wives were lying as if lifeless. There was no doubt as to the reality of the grief of these mourners. Of others, since they seemed rather to welcome a funeral as an occasion for feasting, there is more reason to doubt. But while the Bantu grieve, as we in our quieter fashion grieve when a friend or relative leaves us, they no more than we believe that the dead are extinct. Many things done by them at a funeral show this clearly. Before the grave is filled up, members of the family kneel around it and place various things upon the corpse—a calabash of beer or milk, some seeds, a pipe and a lump of tobacco. The corpse has already been wrapped up in skins and blankets. This is all done in the belief that the deceased will require these things in the other world; he takes them, or rather the immaterial counterparts of them, whither he goes. Finally they bid him farewell: "Good-bye! Do not forget us! See, we have given you tobacco to smoke and food to eat! A good journey to you! Tell old friends who died before you that you left us living well!" The wake may be kept up for a month, and perhaps a year elapses before the obsequies are finally concluded.

*2. The Killing of Cattle and Slaves at Funerals*

As a rule many cattle are killed during a funeral. In the part of Africa where the writer lived longest, as many as a hundred would be killed and consumed during the period of mourning for an important person. It was the ambition of every man to accumulate as many fine bullocks as he could acquire to be killed and eaten at his own funeral. The idea is not simply to sustain the energies of the mourners, but also to provide the deceased with cattle in the other world. More than this, a man, especially a man of consequence, has need, the Bantu argue, of slaves and wives and children to serve and cherish him in the world to which he is going. There is only one way of providing him with them, they must be killed. This line of thought accounts for one of the cruellest of all the cruel practices of the Bantu. Dr. Bentley has described the custom as it existed in his time among the Congo people; he tells us that among the Ba-kuba of the Upper Kasai, on the death of the king or of his sister, the funeral could not take place until three hundred slaves had been killed. He adds: "Some people give the number at one thousand, but three hundred is a safer figure." Let us follow his blood-curdling description: "In a house near by are ten men, secured in forked sticks and firmly tied; they are to accompany him (i.e., the deceased). Among the weeping wives are three or four designated to attend upon him in the spirit world; which is kept a secret as yet, and the life of none of the wives is sure. . . . When all is ready, the body is brought out. The executioner has given the last touch to his huge knife. The crowd gathers in an open space about a strange wooden seat. The unfortunate slaves are brought. One of them is placed in the seat and fastened to it. A tall flexible pole

is stuck into the ground at some distance behind the seat. From the top of the pole a cage-like arrangement is suspended by a cord. The pole is bent down and the cage is fitted to the unfortunate man's head. He is blindfolded, but he knows what is coming, for he has been present before, at like functions, when others were placed on the fatal seat with laughter and much merriment. The executioner commences to dance and make feints; at last, with a fearful yell, he decapitates his victim by one sweep of the huge knife. The pole thus released springs the head into the air. The crowd yells with delight and excitement. The body is unbound and a new victim placed on the seat. The horror is repeated until the ten slaves have rejoined their master. . . . The marked women are seized, four of them; a few blows with a heavy stock suffices to break their arms and legs and they too are placed in the grave, living, but unable to scramble out. The body of their dead lord is then placed upon the groaning women and the earth is filled in." <sup>1</sup>

In Uganda, too, years ago, when the king, the queen, or the queen-mother died, hundreds of people were slain. The royal wives were placed at intervals around the tomb, were clubbed to death and left there unburied. The Uganda people disapproved of their king visiting the grave of his predecessor more than once, and very naturally, too, for on such a visit hundreds of people had to be killed to increase the deceased sovereign's retinue. Similar customs are found in other parts of Africa. Some tribes killed a slave and placed him over the tomb in a sitting posture, with a bow in his hand and an upright stake driven through his body. Others,—but enough of these horrors!

<sup>1</sup> Bentley, W. H., *Pioneering on the Congo*, Vol. I, pp. 254, 255.

### 3. *The Destination of the Departed*

There would seem to be the same confusion of thought in the mind of the Bantu that there is in many of our minds. We speak of our beloved dead as if they were in heaven, while at the same time many of us think of them as ever near us. Some among us also naturally cling to the idea that they sleep their last long sleep in God's acre. So the African will say, in almost the same breath, that the dead have gone to a great village under the earth, where everything is pure and where they till the fields and reap abundant harvests; that they have gone to some far country in the east or north; that they are in the forest surrounding their earthly home; that they are in the house inhabited by the living; that they are wandering about in the guise of wild animals; that they are in the grave, which is the house of the dead. When we recall the fact that most, if not all, Bantu believe that the dead for the most part return to be reborn, we shall get an idea of what some people call the confusion of thought which characterizes the Bantu; others with perhaps equal reason regard it as metaphysical subtlety.

## VI

### THE CULT OF THE DEAD

We have now reached the point where we can study the cult of the dead, or, to give it the more usual name, the ancestor worship of the Bantu. We may accept the latter term on the understanding that we are to give the word "worship" a wider meaning than it commonly bears among ourselves.

#### 1. *The Relation of the Living to the Dead*

It is probably correct to say that the attitude of the Bantu towards the departed is a twofold one, founded on a sense of mutual need. In the close community between the living and the dead neither can do without the other. The living need the help of the departed in battling with the evils of their present existence, and on the other hand the departed depend upon the living for much of their well-being. The dead has some power that the living man does not possess, power proceeding largely from the fact that it lives invisible,—seen at any rate only on rare occasions,—and independent of the laws of space and time. Things hidden to the mortal eye are no secret to the departed. Moreover, they can bring things to pass. If the trees bear a plentiful crop of fruit, if the fields give a good harvest, if sterility falls upon the herds and disease and calamity upon the community, it may be the departed that deserve the credit or the blame. They have the power to bless and to blight. There are other important

agencies in the universe. There is the mysterious energy working in all things, and there is the Supreme Being above all; but the unseen spirits of men and women too have a real power all their own. Normally they are devoted, or one may suppose them to be devoted, to the interests of their family, left harassed and struggling here below. They know life from the inside,—all its care and pain. They are not, as is the Supreme Being, removed far from men. The attitude of trust would seem, then, the proper one to adopt towards these unseen, powerful, experienced beings. We shall go altogether wrong in our estimate of Bantu religion, if we do not recognize that they really do put their faith in these ancestors, now in the spirit world. The old father and the wise, powerful chief were looked up to with affection and trust while they were living. Now that they have gone into the unseen realm and are wiser and more powerful than ever, they are regarded with so much the more trust. We may find much in the life of the Bantu that alienates our sympathies; but, here at the heart of it, let us recognize that they worship the best they have known.

At the same time, in putting off the flesh, the departed have by no means divested themselves of human nature. The best of men are subject to moods; ordinary people are jealous, touchy, fickle; one has to be on his guard not to offend them; for, if angered, they are apt to become vindictive. So it is with the departed; you can never be quite sure of them. Moreover, powerful as they are, they suffer from cold and thirst, if not from hunger, and need the solicitous attention of their family remaining on earth. Any omission on its part to supply their needs will be visited on the head of the offending member, or on the head of some one dear to him. In such an event they must be placated by offerings. To some extent it

is quite true that fear enters into their worship of their ancestors, the fear of the consequences that will follow any failure in their pious duty. Their real feeling is a mingling of trust and fear; does it not merit the name of reverence, that highly compound emotion which is a blend of wonder, fear, trust, gratitude and subjection?

Such reverence is certainly paid to the departed who are recognized by the Bantu as at any rate potentially benevolent; but there are others in the other world who are regarded with unmitigated dread. They are men and women who have departed against their will or who became embittered by the treatment they received, while they were still in the flesh. Such spirits are likely to work off their spleen upon the living. These malcontent, malevolent spirits are the ghosts of people who were drowned, or slain by wild beasts, or killed by witchcraft, or who in passion or despair committed suicide. Their funeral rites, perhaps, were not carried out properly; or they were enslaved by some witch or warlock and now have to carry out their master's behests and plague the living; or they were men and women of a great age who outlived the affections of their family and were neglected; now, as indeed they threatened to do before they died, they haunt their relatives. These evil spirits are universally believed in throughout Bantu Africa and the belief robs life of much of the joy that might otherwise be experienced.

## 2. *The Four Grades of Ancestral Spirits*

With some exceptions the Bantu have a common name for the departed who are held in reverence. This name, which is found in slightly different form in the various languages, is Muzimo, plural Mizimo. The best translation for the word is "divinity" or "divinities." Let us

think of these spirits as graded in four concentric circles. The inmost circle is occupied by a man's own personal divinity, his tutelary genius; the next is occupied by his family divinities, i.e., the ghosts of his father and mother and other near relatives; the third circle is occupied by the communal divinities, which probably are the ghosts of the family of the head of the village; finally, the outmost circle is occupied by the tribal or national divinity or divinities, the ghosts of ancient eminent chiefs. | Each grade of divinities has its own special constituency. The tutelary genius has nothing to do with any individual other than the one to whom he is attached; the family divinities are concerned with only the members of their own family circles; the communal divinities have only to do with the affairs of the village as a whole and have nothing to do with other communities; and the tribal divinity has nothing to do with individuals or parties, but only with the common life of the tribe.

(a) *The Tutelary Genius*.—Dr. Nassau, describing the Mpongwe and Benga tribes of West Africa, says that they believe in a life-spirit “vaguely spoken of by some as a component part of the human personality, by others as separate, but closely associated from birth to death.”<sup>1</sup> This is a man's genius, his own private *muzimo*. How far this belief is common to the Bantu one cannot say, but several writers have called attention to it. The Ba-ila of Northern Rhodesia certainly share in the Mpongwe conception of the genius as a component part of the human personality. They, like others, believe that men and women are reborn. A man named Mungalo, for example, will tell you that he is his grandfather, Mungalo, returned to life. At the same time he will tell you that Mungalo is his genius, his guardian spirit (*muzimo*).

<sup>1</sup> Nassau, R. H., *Fetichism in West Africa*, pp. 64 ff.

That is to say, a man's tutelary genius is the reincarnated spirit within him, the sovereign part of his soul, within him and yet without him, surrounding him, guiding him from birth to death. This is a very subtle conception, not without its own beauty and value. The Ba-ila address the genius as "my namesake." When one of the tribe is minded to go hunting, he rises early and makes an offering of fine meal to his genius and prays thus: "My namesake, let us go to the hunt together. Bring the animals near to me and ward off from me all danger. Give me meat today, oh hunter!" As soon as he has killed an animal, he cuts morsels from the liver, the heart, the foreleg and the leg and throws them north, south, east and west, saying as he does so: "Thou in the west . . ., here is meat for you!" Then he does obeisance and claps his hands, while uttering his formula of thanksgiving: "Tomorrow and tomorrow, give me meat!" This is a thank offering to the *mizimo* in general; then he makes another to his own particular genius, saying: "Here is meat, O my namesake! Tomorrow and tomorrow may I be even more successful. Be thou continually around me, oh hunter!" Whatever good fortune a man may have, whether it be in gaining wealth or in escaping from danger, he ascribes it in the first instance to his genius. If anything untoward happens to him, he makes an offering to his genius and reproaches him for his neglect. If he meets with a fatal accident, his friends can only suppose either that the genius was vexed and had abandoned him to his fate, or that some more powerful agency had worsted the genius.

(b) *The Family Divinities*.—It should be noticed that a distinction is generally made between the divinities pertaining to the father and those relating to the mother. In some tribes the latter are given higher regard than the

former. In a totemistic stage of society the father and mother belong, of course, to different totem clans, and retain their obligations to their respective clans. The obligations of clanship are carried to such an extreme that it would be an offence for the husband to pray to his wife's family divinities, or for her to pray to his. More curious still, it would be an offence on the part of the mother's divinities were they to cause the children to be sick. The children belong to the father; the mother's divinities, while they may assist the father's in guarding the children, have no right to sicken them. It is within their right to make the wife ill, as the father's divinities have the right to make him and his children ill; but they must not trespass on each other's prerogatives.

(c) *The Communal and Tribal Divinities*.—The communal divinities, as we have noted already, belong to the family of the chief or headman of the village. Where, as does not happen everywhere in Africa, there is tribal or national unity and a permanent chief or king, the ancestors of the king rise to the dignity of tribal or national gods. Both these kinds of divinity have to deal, not so much with the affairs of individuals, as with those of the whole community. They will be consulted in case of an epidemic, a drought, or other public calamity. Their aid is invoked on behalf of the crops and the cattle. Naturally they are called upon in time of war. We shall have something more to say presently about the tribal divinities.

### 3. *Communion with the Divinities*

If ever there was a people conscious that they are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses it is the Bantu. They might say with Milton:

“Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth  
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep.”

In and around the village and in the huts themselves these spirits are continually present. It is only rarely, however, that they appear in person before the eyes of people who are awake. How then are they supposed to make their presence known?

(a) *They Often Come in Dreams.*—When a man sees in his sleep the phantom of a person he used to know, he has no doubt that the person has actually visited him. If it be a relative, and therefore in the ranks of his family divinities, he will make an offering to the spirit when he wakes. The departed often come in this way with benevolent motives,—to reveal the name of some drug, or the composition of some charm, to give advice as to how to reply to a charge that is hanging over a living man's head, to tell where game will be found, or to reveal the machinations of some witch against members of the family.

(b) *They Appear in the Forms of Animals.*—The Bantu believe that the dead take the form of animals such as a mantis, a puff-adder, a crocodile or lion. Some men and women are said to procure extremely powerful drugs which enable them, at death, to become certain animals. The writer was one day in the hut erected over the grave of an influential chief, when some men showed him a tortoise which they declared to have issued from the grave and to be the chief himself. This same chief was said to be roaming the district in the form of a lion. Should people of that community come across a lion eating his prey in the forest, and should it leave the meat and walk off at their approach, they would be convinced that they had met their old chief again and that he had killed the animal expressly for their benefit. If people notice a snake in the neighborhood of a grave, they believe it to be the dead person buried there and will refrain from molesting it. This is probably the motive of the python-worship

found in Uganda, for example; the huge reptile has a temple and an attendant to give it food, is regarded as the giver of children, and receives from its suppliants offerings of beer and goats.

(c) *They Cause Sickness.*—Divinities make their presence known also by causing sickness. Any disease, but especially those in which delirium occurs, or in which there is great emaciation, may be regarded as the act of a divinity. It is his way of reminding the living of his existence. Recourse is had in the first instance to the diviner, who, after consulting his oracle, announces that it is so-and-so who is causing the sickness, because the family has neglected him lately. Then the members of the family gather, make their offering and pray the offended divinity to be appeased and permit the patient to recover.

(d) *They Speak through Mediums and Prophets.*—Another way in which the divinities make themselves known is by means of mediums and prophets. We are all familiar in these days with the pretensions of people in America and Europe to hold intercourse with the dead. Without presuming to estimate the truth there may be in their claim, we may point out the fact that when they speak of this as a new revelation spiritualists are wrong. This sort of thing obtains in Africa and probably has obtained for thousands of years. No unsophisticated African would deny the possibility of the dead making their will known to the living through a medium. The Bantu make a regular practice of it and the oracles of the divinities received in this way are accepted as law. The medium is therefore a very important person. In Uganda every temple erected for the accommodation of a deity has at least one medium attached to it, very often a woman, who periodically falls into a trance and delivers

the god's messages. In other parts of Africa, though perhaps not in such an organized manner, the same practice prevails. There are occasional as well as professional mediums. A person will suddenly be seized with a fit and when addressed by those present will announce the name of some deceased individual and proceed to deliver a message from him. Sometimes in a mysterious awe-inspiring fashion a number of people will be possessed at once, will roll about foaming at the mouth, and, going through the most terrible contortions of body, will throw themselves on the ground, against rocks and trees or even into the fire, without feeling pain. In such cases the spirits have to be exorcised. Such a person may never again be possessed, or he may thereafter be from time to time affected by the spirit and deliver messages. Sometimes the announcement has to do with future events, that there will be drought or famine or pestilence; sometimes a spirit announces through the medium that he is about to be reborn; another spirit threatens his heir with calamity, if the children he left behind are not better treated. Sometimes the message spoken by the medium is sufficient to condemn a perfectly innocent person as a witch.

Now and then there arises in a tribe a man who gives himself out to be some great one, some long-departed hero, or even the Creator Himself. It is difficult to draw the line between such prophets and the mediums we have just spoken of; but these prophets do not always speak in a trance; they go from place to place setting forth their claims in an ordinary voice, but declaring themselves to be possessed by, or to be speaking in the name of, some divinity or god. They promise and threaten the most extraordinary things. The writer knew of one who announced that he would destroy a certain grub that at the time was devastating the crops, that he would turn the

sun black for six days, would tear up the railway and drive all the Europeans from the country. All this was on the condition that the people would first destroy their cattle. It is amazing how readily the people give credence to these fellows. In this case the people had actually begun to kill their cattle, when the British Government put a stop to the prophet's activities. History tells of many similar, and of some much more disastrous "prophecyings" among the Bantu.

(e) *They Take up Their Abode in Certain Objects.*—Another way the divinities make their presence felt is by taking up their abode in certain objects such as a piece of cloth, a basket, a doll, or a graven image. This idea is closely akin to fetishism. Such objects are set aside as sacred. The Ba-thonga have a very venerated object which consists of the nails and hair of a long line of deceased chiefs, kneaded together with the dung of the oxen that were killed at their funerals, and all bound together with thongs of hide. Whenever the chief of the tribe dies his relics are added to the bundle. At present it is about a foot in length. It is brought out and brandished by the officiant when making a sacrifice, and is regarded as in some way bound up with the life of the whole clan. M. Junod, who described it, did not indicate whether this "national amulet" is considered to be the localization of the divinities of the tribe, but that would appear to be its significance. It reminds us of the practice of the Ba-ganda, who always remove the lower jawbone of the corpse of the deceased king in the belief that his ghost clings to it and will be quite satisfied to remain with it as long as it is honored. The Ba-ganda possess the jawbones of kings who lived a thousand years ago. A temple is erected to receive the sacred relic. The spirit of the deceased not only stays with the bone, but also takes posses-

sion of some man who is sent to the temple to be the medium through whom it is possible to hold converse with the defunct king.

#### 4. *Sacred Localities Associated with the Divinities*

As far as the writer is aware the practice described in the last paragraph is not common among the Bantu tribes; nor are they widely accustomed to make graven images of the dead. But they all have sacred spots which are intimately associated with the departed. Naturally one of these spots is at the grave. Many tribes erect miniature huts over the graves, or in the vicinity, and there make their offerings to the deceased. Others erect similar "temples" in the villages and are careful to remove them, whenever the village is shifted to a new site. Some plant a ring of poles around the grave, poles cut from some tree that readily takes root, so that in course of time a grove marks the spot. The tribal divinities often have vast groves of this kind associated with their worship. The gateway of the village and the doorway of the hut are also sacred places, for the departed congregate there and protect their people going in and coming out. Offerings to them are made at the threshold and at the foot of the central supporting pole in the hut. In many of the large village enclosures one will see a tree or a pronged-pole that is also sacred; at the foot of them offerings are made and upon their branches things are hung to put them in the divinities' keeping. Mountain tops are also sacred places in some parts of Africa.

#### 5. *Prayers and Offerings to the Divinities*

Here, then, the people gather to perform their religious rites; the members of a family at the grave or in the hut, the village community under the sacred tree or

around the grave, the larger community at the sacred grove or before the temple erected for the tribal divinity. Ancestor worship as it exists in Africa is a religion without an organized priesthood. At least there is only a rudimentary priesthood associated with the public divinities. We have seen how each man approaches his own tutelary genius. Within the family, the father or the elder son of the deceased acts in the name of all the members. Where the tribal divinity has a temple or sacred grove, there is an individual who is placed in charge of it and it is he who periodically summons the people to worship and leads their devotions.

The offerings to the divinities consist of things which the living use in their ordinary every-day life: the produce of their fields and herds or simple articles of dress and food. Except in the case of sacrifices on the larger scale, as when cattle are offered to the tribal divinities, the offerings have little or no intrinsic value. It is not, therefore, a case of buying the favor of the divinities with gifts of a high price, but rather of pleasing them by an act of attention and affection. Indeed the simplest offering of all, and one which is the usual accompaniment of prayers in some tribes, is the saliva. We cannot easily bring ourselves to understand the condition of mind that sees religious value in such an offering; the idea of spitting as an act of worship is repellent to us. But if we think of the spittle as what it is,—a part of oneself,—then perhaps we may begin to realize how it can come to have sacramental value as an offering. It is not that there is any intrinsic worth in the spittle, or that it can conceivably be of any use to the divinity; but simply because its value is nil, it acquires a real religious value. It is something like a lover offering a flower to his beloved. It creates a bond, or renews the bond, between the worshipper

and his divinity. And this gives a clue, I think, to the meaning of all the offerings. They are not bribes. Nor is the offering a magical performance. We are too apt to conclude, perhaps, that mere ritual is regarded as efficacious in swaying the will of the divinities and gaining their favor; we say that the acts of worship must be performed at certain times, at certain places and in certain prescribed ways, otherwise they would have no value; once carried out in the proper manner the effect is sure and certain. No doubt among the Bantu, as among peoples of higher culture, worship often degenerates into formalism of this character; but there can be little doubt that to the more piously-minded of them, at any rate, these acts of worship have a real religious value. They come before their divinities with a prayer and an offering, divinities who are not mere abstractions of thought, but the spirits of men and women who once lived here below and are still full of human nature. These offerings create and renew the bond which unites them all, and in the contact the human soul feels itself lifted up and strengthened.

Of some tribes it is said that they never approach the divinities as long as life runs smoothly. But it is not true of all. When a Thonga native has ground tobacco for snuff, he puts two spoonfuls on the domestic altar as a thank offering, one for the paternal and the other for the maternal divinities. Many Bantu, when breaking their fast in the morning, scatter a few morsels of bread, and, when smoking the first morning pipe blow smoke up into the air, with a few words, or with a silent thought, addressed to their guardian spirit or to the domestic divinities. This is an acknowledgment of the spiritual presence about them.

It is when the divinities make their displeasure felt by causing a member of the family to fall ill that the family

meets to make offerings. Consultation with the diviner has revealed the identity of the offended divinity and now the family meets in the house and its head prays thus: "Tsu! If it be thou who art causing our child's sickness, see here is the beer that thou desirest and also some tobacco; we pray thee, leave him alone that he may recover." With *Tsu!* he ejects a little saliva, and while praying offers the beer in both hands, as if the divinity were standing there in person.

The community makes its offerings at the seasons of the year when the help of the divinities is most needed, such as sowing and reaping time, and especially when there is a drought. Some tribes have regular periods when the communal or tribal divinities are worshipped. One period may be at the turn of the year, when the Pleiades appear in the sky, giving notice of the approach of the cultivating season. This is a critical time. It is the beginning of the new year. Blessing must be sought on field and herd and community. Hence the great festival that so commonly takes place at this season. Another supremely joyous festival takes place after the harvest is gathered in. It is a Thanksgiving. All such festivals have features in common. The people dance, dressed in all their barbaric finery; they consume great quantities of beer; there is often a slackening of restraints leading to much license, though it is to be borne in mind that the immorality on these occasions has often a ritual significance. Among the Ba-ila and perhaps among other tribes, there is no sacrifice on such occasions; there is no shedding of the blood of oxen; there is no priestly ritual. They are purely democratic festivals, in which chiefs, freemen and slaves, men and women and children, all take part in song and dance and feast and unite in invoking the name of the great communal *muzimo*, who rejoices to

see his people happy with their herds and flocks and will respond by sending increase and plenty.

Expiatory sacrifices are offered when murder within the community has occurred, for the great *muzimo* is the guardian of the lives of his people and is seriously offended when one of them is wantonly destroyed. The murderer's clansmen have to contribute a number of cattle that are taken by the murdered man's clan as blood-money. They also have to bring one or two oxen that are solemnly killed and offered to the *muzimo* on behalf of the whole community as an expiation.

M. Junod, writing of the Ba-thonga, says that ancestor worship "has no, or at least very little, connection with the moral conduct of the individual."<sup>1</sup> Whether this is true of the Bantu generally depends to a great extent on what we mean by "moral conduct." It is questionable whether men and women are more chaste, honest or truthful because of their ancestors; in these respects the worshippers do not rise superior to their divinities, who, whatever else they have gained since departing this life, have not made any real moral progress. But what has been said above about the expiatory sacrifice when a murder has been committed goes to show that, so far as some at least of the Bantu are concerned, ancestor worship has some ethical implication. To be sure that influence is limited: a man will not desist from homicide, as homicide, out of reverence for, or from fear of, his communal divinities. They are quite indifferent as regards the lives of people who do not belong to their particular community. As far as they are concerned, the killing of a stranger is no murder and no sin. Still, circumscribed as the moral influence may be, it is there. While perhaps the direct influence over the individual may be small, it is certain

<sup>1</sup> Junod, H. A., *The Life of a South African Tribe*, Vol. II, p. 388.

that ancestor worship has considerable effect socially, especially as a binding force, and therefore indirectly it must have considerable influence over the individual, in ways difficult to define, perhaps, but none the less real.

## VII

### NATURE SPIRITS

So much, then, for the ancestor worship of the Bantu. Now another question arises: Have they any idea of spiritual beings apart from the spirits of men, and do they in any sense worship them? We remember what Seneca said: "If you come upon a grove of old trees that have shot up above the common height and shut out the sight of the sky by the gloom of their matted boughs, you feel there is a spirit in the place, so lofty is the wood, so lone the spot, so wondrous the thick unbroken shade."<sup>1</sup> Do the Bantu share that natural feeling, not only as regards woods, but also in regard to rivers, mountains, springs, lakes and the sea? According to the testimony of many writers the Bantu do believe in such nature spirits, but it is very difficult to define them precisely. It would be strange indeed if the mighty rivers of Africa, the expansive lakes, the deep dark forests, as well as the gentle bubbling springs and the rolling ocean, made no religious impression upon the people who lived in their vicinity. That, in one way or another, the Bantu are deeply impressed by these things nobody can doubt who knows them. But does their awe arise from, or induce, a belief that these things are in themselves animate and divine, or that they are the dwelling places of spirits? And if the latter, are the spirits the same as, or are they different from, the

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *Epist.* iv, 12.3.

ancestral spirits? Probably all three varieties of the belief exist among the Bantu. Thus Dr. Donald Fraser says of the Tambuka that "many of the mighty natural objects were worshipped, such as conspicuous hills, wild waterfalls, great trees, deep pools. They were not revered as the dwelling-place of some deity or spirits, but as themselves animate and divine. Thus two hills in the Rukuru gorge are often worshipped. Passers in the gorge declare that they can sometimes hear the cocks belonging to the hills crow, and when the sound of the tumbling water echoes between the mountain-sides they say the hills are at war with one another, and they travel on in haste and terror."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Roscoe, writing of the Baganda, gives us another phase of this nature-worship. "The principal rivers," he says, "were thought to have spirits, which were credited with powers for good or for evil."<sup>2</sup> In the old days no great river in Uganda was bridged; people who wished to cross a stream had to swim, or to paddle a canoe, or to jump from tuft to tuft on the papyrus roots, in any case there being some danger attached to the crossing. Therefore a traveller would take a few coffee-berries, and, after asking the river-spirit to give him a safe crossing, he would throw the coffee-berries into the water. If a man was carried away by the current, his friends did not try to save him, for they feared that the spirit would take them also. The Baganda believed also in forest-gods, who had to be consulted before any trees could be felled, and who made hunters bold and protected them from wild animals. Mr. Roscoe tells us that certain hill-spirits were the ghosts of wild animals; he does not say that any of the others were the spirits of men. When we turn to the Bathonga, M. Junod speaks of lakes and

<sup>1</sup> Fraser, D., *Winning a Primitive People*, pp. 122, 123.

<sup>2</sup> Roscoe, J., *The Baganda*, p. 318.

rivers inhabited by spirits and says that the more you search the better you identify these lake and river spirits with ancestor gods. He found one instance of what seemed to be a true nature spirit, but further investigation proved that it too was identified with an ancestral spirit. The writer's own experience among the Ba-ila was similar. They too stand in awe of mighty trees and speak with bated breath of some mighty spirit in them, but one always finds that the spirit was once a living man or woman. When a site was selected for the mission station at Kasenga, an old chief, whose forebears had formerly lived there, came from some distance away to beg, indeed to warn the writer, not to cut down certain trees and not to use certain anthills as material for building. In case they were thus used, he believed that powerful spirits who lived in them would resent the interference. These seemed at first to be nature spirits, but they turned out to be the spirits of the old man's ancestors. The more one investigates the spirits believed in by the Ba-ila, the more they resolve themselves into spirits of human beings. We may leave the question at this point. Enough has been said to show that the Bantu are vividly conscious that the world around them is not merely material but is shot through and through with spirit.

## VIII

### TRIBAL DIVINITIES PASSING OVER INTO GODS

Some writers, like the Euhemerists of old, would have us believe that "god" is synonymous with "dead ancestor," and that even the *Suprême Being* is no more nor less than a glorified ghost. It can be shown that as far as the Bantu is concerned this is not true. Let us be prepared ourselves to reach a conclusion by considering how much there is of truth in the Euhemeristic contention. Let it be admitted at once that many of the gods worshipped by the Bantu are the ghosts of dead men. It is likewise true that there is in their belief a *Supreme Being* who is not a ghost.

If one asks what difference there is between a divinity and a god, it must be admitted that the difference is one of degree and not of kind; both classes are varieties of the species, ancestral spirit. I use the word "god" to indicate that variety which is of the greater importance, is revered over a wider area, and of which the human origin is quite forgotten, or almost forgotten.

It is a well known fact that many people imagine heaven to be a glorified earth so that they organize it in imagination after the manner of the social system to which they are accustomed. If they are used to a monarchy on earth, they naturally think of a monarchy in the spirit world, with a chief, counsellors, etc. Theological

beliefs are largely determined by the structure of society on earth. The Ba-ganda are the only Bantu, as far as the writer knows, that have had an uninterrupted line of kings for at least a thousand years. It is only natural that they should have developed ancestor-worship into a more elaborate polytheism than can be found among other Bantu tribes. We may say of all of these gods what Mr. Roscoe says of one of them: "The human element has been lost in the divine, . . . the natural has been effaced by the supernatural, until, in the minds of the common people, only the supernatural remains."<sup>1</sup> These gods need not be described minutely. There are about forty in all. Among them is Mukasa, the god of plenty, benign, who never asked for the life of a human being and never had anything to do with war; Kibuka, the war-god; Walumbe, the god of death, etc. These were all indisputably men at one time. And what is so highly developed in Uganda we find on a limited scale in other parts of Africa. He who sets out to enquire into Bantu religion and especially into their idea of God, must be on his guard, lest he take a deified ancestor for the Supreme Being.

<sup>1</sup> Roscoe, J., *The Baganda*, p. 291.

## IX

### THE BANTU CONCEPTION OF THE SUPREME BEING

It has been said that "the most obscure and difficult question connected with the religion of the Bantu is whether they have any belief in a Supreme God, a Creator, an overruling Providence."<sup>1</sup> It is the writer's strong conviction that the more the Bantu are studied, the more confidently this question can be answered in the affirmative.

#### 1. *It Plays an Unproductive Part in Bantu Life*

While the Bantu believe in a Supreme Being, we must add that their conception is not a vital, effective one. It does not enter into their daily life, as does the belief in charms or the belief in the ancestral spirits. This is one distinguishing feature between God and the divinities. The divinities have local habitations,—temples, groves or mountain-tops; the Supreme Being has none. The divinities may have a priesthood, however rudimentary; the Supreme Being has none set apart, in any sense, for His service. Offerings are made to the divinities; rarely if ever are any made to the Supreme Being. Prayers are commonly addressed to the divinities; to the Supreme Being they are made only on occasions of extreme necessity. The people can understand divinities, who are like

<sup>1</sup>Hartland, E. S., Article on *Bantu and South Africa*, in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, p. 363.

unto themselves, whom they may have seen in the flesh, who know human life from the inside and are ever near; the Supreme Being no man hath ever seen; He is remote, inscrutable. The divinities have to do with individuals, communities, tribes; the Supreme Being is Creator and Lord of all; His sphere is cosmical; He controls the great forces of nature and but rarely has to do with individuals and communities. In all these respects there is, in the mind of the Bantu, a great and striking difference between the ancestral divinities and the Supreme Being. The latter is away on the fringe of their consciousness; the former occupy the center of attention.

We may, in this respect, even compare the native mind to a palimpsest, a manuscript which has been over-written again and again so that the original writing is deciphered only with great difficulty. It is the writer's conviction, in which many experienced students of the Bantu agree, that in former times they had a clearer idea of God and that it has been obscured by an overgrowth of dynamism, fetishism and ancestor-worship. This is somewhat analogous to what we find in certain countries nearer home, where the saints, who were and still are regarded officially as mediators, have attained such a position as almost to take the place of the Heavenly Father in the minds of the ignorant populace.

It is a noteworthy fact, vouched for by many missionaries, that when one goes to pagan Bantu one does not have to prove the existence of God. They easily accept the idea of the God of Christianity. As M. Junod says: "They have almost no difficulty in believing that this is the real God to be worshipped. . . . It seems as if one were telling them an old story, with which they had been quite familiar but had now half forgotten." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Junod, H. A., *The Life of a South African Tribe*, Vol. II, p. 410.

How far it has been forgotten may be seen in the case of some South African tribes. The word now in use for "God" among the Ba-suto is *Molimo*, which is really the same, and used to mean the same, as *muzimo*, the common designation of the ancestral spirit. The early missionaries, since they could find no other term, used *Molimo* as a translation of "God" and of course the natives have come to give it the Christian sense, but originally it simply meant "ghost." The word for God in the Zulu language today is *u-Tixo* but it is a borrowed name; they seem to have had none of their own in use, when the missionaries first came among them. But the traditions of these tribes show that formerly both the Zulus and the Ba-suto had some conception of a powerful and beneficent Being distinct from the spirits of their ancestors. Dr. Callaway tells us that the Zulus spoke of the Lord of Heaven. An old Musuto, born at the end of the eighteenth century, told a missionary of an adventure he had with lions which ended in finding himself at the foot of a steep precipice with a broken leg and with the prospect either of dying of starvation or being devoured by wild beasts. In his extremity he prayed this prayer: "Oh, new gods, pray for me to the God of old that He may help me." Among the central tribes, the name of God is not forgotten and we shall now relate what they say about Him, although their idea at the best remains somewhat otiose and unproductive.

## 2. *The Three Most Common Names for God and Their Meanings*

One should not be surprised to find that the idea of God is hazy among the untutored Bantu. Most men, most civilized men, have vague ideas of Him. It is said of a very good and very candid American deacon that, in answer to

his pastor's question at a prayer-meeting, he defined his idea of God as "a kind of oblong blur." What, then, is to be expected of pagan Bantu?

Sir H. H. Johnston in his monumental "Comparative Grammar of the Bantu Languages" has collected vocabularies of three hundred and sixty-six Bantu and eighty-seven semi-Bantu languages and dialects. It is interesting to observe that in almost all these there is given an equivalent for "God." But of course it is not sufficient for them to have the names; we want to know what they mean to them. It is possible that some of them are the names of departed ancestors, who have been elevated into gods. In the absence of detailed and trustworthy information it is impossible to say. Some of the names are in use by single tribes; some are known and used over large areas. Preeminent among the latter are three names which together cover the usage in a large part of Central Africa. In about fifty languages and dialects there are variants of the name *Mulungu*; in about forty more there are variants of the name *Nyambe*; and in about fifteen widely spread languages we find the name *Leza* in slightly different forms. It is interesting to note that *Mulungu* is confined to the tribes in the east, as *Nyambe* is confined to those in the west, while *Leza* is in use by tribes in the central parts. These three names for God have been carefully studied. While probably of none of them have we yet an exhaustive account, enough has been written to enable us to understand what they mean to the people using them. Moreover, we find that the ideas behind these names are very much alike, so that it is possible to form some conception of what the Bantu mean by "God."

An important aid in this investigation is the fact that besides the names above mentioned, most of these tribes

have secondary or additional titles for the Supreme Being. Dr. Farnell says: "The epithets whereby a Greek divinity was addressed in prayer and in official hymns give the best clue to the ideas of ancient worship." When, for example, we are told that the Greeks addressed Zeus with such titles as "cloud-wrapped," "delighting in thunder," we know some at least of the ideas held in regard to him. There is a widespread custom among the Bantu of giving such titles to animals and men as well as to God. When a man, for example, sees a dove spreading its wings in a certain way, he greets it with this salutation: *Chinakatuetue, chisangila-ku-balombe-ku-bashimbindukubankuba nsangila*, which means, "Oh Chinaka-tuetue, giver-of-happiness-to-men-to-girls-not-so-much, make me happy." Invocations of the Supreme Being often take much the same form as this; and just as this many-hyphenated phrase gives us one of the Bantu notions in regard to the dove, that is, that it gives happiness, so do the epithets addressed to God contain a suggestion of the theology of the Bantu.

We may now briefly sum up what we can learn from an examination of the three names mentioned above.

(a) *God is Intimately Associated with the Sky and What Comes from It.*—When we civilized people say "it rains" or "it blows," our learned grammarians call the word "it" a prop-word and tell us that it remains in such sentences as evidence of an ancient belief that the sky-god fell in the form of rain, and so on. In place of our word "it" the Ba-ila say "Leza," that is, God. Thus for "it blows" they say "Leza blows"; for "it rains" they say "Leza falls." Especially in those parts of Africa where rain is scarce and where the people depend entirely upon it for watering their crops, the rain is intimately associated with the Supreme Being; indeed some give the same

name "Leza" to both. And, as we should expect, it is particularly in times of drought that the people seek after God. They meet in great assemblies and call upon Him. "Come to us," cry the Ba-ila, "come to us a continued rain; Oh Leza, fall." And as is the rain, so are thunder and lightning regarded as manifestations of the Supreme Being. The rainbow is commonly spoken of as "God's bow."

(b) *God is the Creator.*—However they may name Him,—*Nyambe, Leza, Mulungu*,—the Bantu regard the Supreme Being as the Creator of all things. Such titles as these are given to Him: "The Moulder," "The Great Constructor," "The First to do Things," "The Almighty."

(c) *God is the Determiner of Destiny.*—The writer remembers an old pagan saying to him: "Life is like a labor-ticket that the white men give to their workmen; before your time is up, you cannot leave, but as soon as it expires, you get your money and have to go." His idea was that the term of our life, our destiny, is fixed by the Supreme Being and there is no escape from it. When a person dies a natural death the Ba-ila, with no irreverence, often say: "God has snapped off his pumpkin," meaning that He takes a life when the time arrives. The same people have a proverb: "When you are happiest God sees you," not to share in your happiness, but to cut you off with a swift disaster. Often they will say of an unfortunate person: "God has looked upon him." Natural death, as we should call it, is named by many of the Bantu, "A death that comes from God." Whatever in life is most inexplicable, that cannot be put down to the agency of witchcraft, talismans, divinities, is ascribed to Him.

(d) *Yet There is Some Idea of God as Benevolent.*—Though death is thus often associated with God, it is perhaps significant that the Bantu have made some attempt

to absolve God from the responsibility of death, as if they felt that it was not compatible with His benevolence. There is a well known Bantu myth which represents God in the beginning of things as sending the chameleon to tell men that they should live forever. Through the chameleon's dilatoriness the message came too late, and to this day the people hate that innocent creature for having caused death to pass upon all men. Another myth ascribes the first death to the inhumanity of man. It would seem that the Bantu thought that death was not in the original constitution of things, and that they are loth to ascribe its coming to the Supreme Being. And the fact that the rain falls on the evil and the good, the just and the unjust, and falls, in greater or less amount with regularity, year by year, is evidence to their minds that the Supreme Being wishes men well; so they name Him "Nourisher," "The Bountiful Giver," "Guardian of Men."

(e) *Morality is Ascribed to God.*—That God should take note of all doings of individual men and should reward and punish them according to their deeds is an idea quite remote from the Bantu mind. Yet in some faint way they have a notion that He makes for righteousness. They commonly name Him in oaths, and a frequent curse on their lips is, "May God smite you." Certain tribes assign the origin of some of their customs to Him; others, when they see a halo around the sun or moon, say there is a judgment above. The expiatory sacrifice offered to the communal divinity after a murder has already been described. Moreover it is quite certain that the Ba-ila think that the divinity conveyed the sacrifice to Leza, the Supreme Being, for he was responsible to Him for the lives of his people.

(f) *God is a Person.*—"Leza" and "Nyambe" are personal names; they are each spoken of as "he" not "it."

But "Mulungu" is not a personal name; it is the name of a class. Many people include under the term not the Deity only but also all that pertains to the spirit world. Indeed many of those that use the names "Leza" and "Nyambe" and speak of God as "He" are not quite certain that He is not the natural phenomena of rain, thunder and the like, or that He is not at most the animating spirit within those phenomena. We have seen that the Bantu believe the world to be permeated by hidden mysterious energies, and it would seem that many of them do not already distinguish God from these; to them God is the power that works in and from the sky. The other facts already mentioned, especially some of the praise-titles ascribed to God, show that God is by many of the Bantu regarded as a Person.

### 3. *Their Groping after God*

It would be an exaggeration to represent the Bantu as conscious seekers after God. It is but rarely that they offer prayers and sacrifices to Him; He is to almost all an "absentee God." Yet their attitude towards Him is reverential and they have tried to reconcile the hard facts of life with a conviction of His benevolence.

That some have been impelled by the enigmas of life to seek God—and have sought Him in vain—would seem to be the meaning of a legend narrated by the Ba-ila. It tells of a very old woman who, perplexed by the riddle of this painful earth set out to find God and to demand from him an explanation. God, they say, had beset her before and behind and had laid His hand upon her, taking from her all that she had, to the last of her children's children. Then into her heart came this desperate resolution; somewhere up there in the sky must be God's dwelling, if only she could reach it. She began to rear a tower to reach to

heaven, but again and again it fell. She had to surrender in despair any hope of reaching God in that way, but somewhere there must be another road to Him! She had noticed that on the far horizon earth and sky seemed to touch. Surely, if she could get there, she could be able to find God at last. So she set out on her long journey and as she went through many lands the people asked her: "Where are you going all alone, old woman?" And she replied: "I am seeking God."—"Seeking God! What for?"—"I want to ask, 'Why?' Tell me, did ever any one suffer as I have suffered?"—"Suffer? How have you suffered?"—"I am alone. He has taken all whom I ever loved, all that ever loved me. I want to ask Him, 'Why?' " And they said to her: "Old woman, in what do you differ from others? God afflicts us all in the same way. He besets us, we cannot shake Him off." The old woman never found God; and from her day to this nobody has ever had an answer to her question. So say the Ba-ila, and in this legened one seems to hear the questionings of all the millions of the Bantu. What answer is there but Christ?

#### 4. *Origin and Value of the Idea*

Various attempts have been made to explain the origin of the idea of God found in elementary religions. Some have considered it so incongruous with other beliefs and with the state of society among the people where it is found that it must be an importation from abroad. Some have conjectured that the idea has birth in the mind of the missionary, who now reads into the beliefs of the people what he first suggested to them. This may be dismissed at once. Both the names for God and the ideas about Him are found where no missionary has ever taught. It used to be said that the Supreme Being was

only the dead hero elevated to the highest power. This cannot nowadays be entertained. More recently it has been suggested that the idea of God in elementary religions arises by a personification of Mana,—the name that is given by the Pacific Islanders to that mysterious energy of which we have spoken. There may be some truth in this suggestion. Undoubtedly the aspect under which God most appeals to the Bantu is His power. We can easily imagine a stage at which primitive people thought of this immanent energy working in all things without ascribing it to any personality. The same entity that gave efficacy to a drug and to a charm, that enabled men to walk and talk and perform all their functions, was conceived as working also in the heavens, gathering the clouds, flashing in the lightning, rolling in the thunder, sighing in the wind and falling in the rain. The untutored savage would agree with Herbert Spencer that “amidst all the mystery of our inscrutable existence there remains the one absolute certainty that we are in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed.” But just as he has advanced from the idea of a vital principle in his body to the conception of a personality that is independent of the body, so in the highest phase of his belief has he advanced to the concept of a Personal Being distinct from the cosmical energies.

One might conjecture, but could not prove, that the ancestors of the Bantu were in touch perhaps with some monotheistic people, Semitic or other, and that this contact was sufficient to crystallize their ideas on the subject.

For us Christian people no theory of the origin of the Bantu conception of God can be complete that does not include the guiding Spirit of God who wills to be known of His children. He who believes in that Spirit will look

upon dynamism as the pathway along which men have been led towards God.

To the missionary the value of the idea can hardly be over-estimated. He has not to begin his work by proving the existence of God. He will find among these pagans those who are as sure of God's existence as he himself is. How very much more difficult would his work be, were it otherwise and he had to demonstrate God's existence, inculcate reverence, and give the first elementary lesson in prayer to an unseen being! The foundation of his work is already laid. Yet what we have said is sufficient to show that all is not done that calls for doing. It matters much that men should believe in God's existence; what kind of a God they believe in matters much more. One finds agnostics among the Bantu. Men who have never heard of the Synthetic Philosophy, who could not define their terms, would say in their own fashion, with Spencer, that the actuality lying behind all appearance is unknowable. One finds others, too, who cherish the thought of God's remoteness, because it is the more comfortable belief for themselves; a God near at hand, they feel, would not tolerate their evil ways. To the great mass of people, God is there, but He is veiled amid the silences. It is for the missionary to make God present and alive and real to them by introducing them to Him who is the Way to the Father and by making the life and love of Christ meaningful and credible by demonstrating it through his own daily life and conduct.

## X

### THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO THE BANTU

In what precedes there has been an attempt to make an impartial examination of Bantu religion in all its aspects, good and bad. It now remains to estimate its permanence and to relate it to Christianity and the Christian approach.

#### 1. *Aspects of Bantu Religious Life*

(a) *It is Real.*—The Bantu have a genuine religion and are eminently religious. In the great controversy between the spiritual and the material, between religion and non-religion, they are on the side of the angels. This is a great preliminary asset. There is a sub-stratum of truth in their religious conceptions. There is such a thing as all-immanent energy; there is a spirit in man that survives the dissolution of the body; there is a God distinct from the powers of Nature; there is such a thing as retribution. They have gone wrong, tragically wrong, in many of their inferences, as when, basing their practices upon the principles of dynamism, they seek out and cruelly put witches and wizards to death, and when they carry their animistic beliefs to the logical extreme in sacrificing women and slaves to give the deceased a retinue; but they are right fundamentally in many things. Many of their social customs and institutions have religious sanctions; some of the worst, other than those just referred to, are grounded in religious convictions.

(b) *Yet It is a Religion of Fear.*—Their religion places the Bantu in continual bondage to fear. This is not true in every respect, but it is true on the whole. They fear evil spirits. They fear magical powers wrought by witches and wizards. They are in bondage to irrational tabus. Nobody can live among them without realizing this aspect of their life. Stewart of Lovedale wrote out of the fullness of his knowledge: "The pooriness and hardness, narrowness and joylessness of human existence in paganism, in Central Africa at least, must be seen to be understood." It is true. But above all, what strikes one about them is their shrinking, suspicious, apprehensive attitude to life, and this is the legitimate fruit of their religious belief. The religion of love, when accepted, brings a sense of great deliverance. Christianity is freedom from the fear that hath torment.

(c) *It is Doomed to Pass Away.*—The actual Bantu religion cannot survive contact with civilization. Year by year the waves of European civilization are sweeping in irresistibly upon the Bantu. They are being rudely shaken out of the torpor of centuries. But yesterday, it seems, they were living in a secluded world of their own, living as their forefathers had lived for centuries, with the very dimmest notions of any more spacious universe. Now the energetic white man has burst in upon them, with his railways, his motor-cars, his flying machines, his passion for precious metals, his hunger for land, his need for trade. No wonder they feel harried and perplexed. The change is too rapid. They are being educated, not only by missions, but also to some extent in government schools and, above all, by contact with white men on railways, plantations and mines. A profound change is everywhere taking place in their social life. Until recently, they knew no external authority but that of their

own chiefs. Now their country is parcelled out among alien European nations, who have sent white magistrates to govern them. The most enlightened governments everywhere seek to rule through the old-established chiefdoms and thus to maintain the tribal society, but however genuinely they may be anxious to maintain and strengthen the authority of these chiefs, inevitably the presence of a white magistrate undermines their position. Their people can now appeal to the magistrate against their decisions. They can be removed from office. They are deprived of the power of life and death which, in consultation with their counsellors, they once enjoyed. We are not complaining of this state of affairs; it is inevitable and results in the abolition of much cruel despotism. Life is now in many respects securer than ever it was before. But what it means is that the tribal life tends to break up under the impact of alien civilization and with the tribal life evaporate many of the restraints to which they have hitherto been subject. Much of their religion is quite incongruous with the changed conditions, for it is intimately linked up with the tribal system and can hardly survive it. At its best it was a tribal religion. It was closely attached to the soil, the hallowed soil where their ancestors were buried. They gathered there around the sacred grove in the presence of the ancestral divinity, who was the strongest of their tribal bonds. He kept them together in a common allegiance to him. However inadequate in our judgment the moral implications of that allegiance may be, it is the strongest of their ties. Cut away belief in the ancestral spirits and the tribe becomes a mere conglomeration of individuals without responsibility the one towards another. The chief himself, whether elected to his office or whether he inherits of right, depends for his authority in the last resort upon religious sanctions.

He wields his power, not through any police force, not because of his wealth, but simply through his personality. His power rests upon public opinion, and in the eyes of his public he is a sacrosanct person, deriving his wisdom, his personality, his authority, from occult powers. Destroy belief in occult powers, all that we mean by dynamism, and the chief becomes a nullity, a mere puppet obeying the directions of an alien hand. So with the tribal morality. As we have seen already, it is very largely based upon tabu, which rests upon a dynamistic basis. Education and a wider experience of the world will disintegrate many of the present customs and show the Bantu that much of their tribal morality is founded upon wrong suppositions. They will learn that a curse means nothing, that science gives no sanction to what they have believed to be the inevitable connection between certain acts and certain consequences. They will see that after all these are but imagination beliefs. As we have seen, murder within a clan was not, among many tribes at least, punished by the chief; it was the restraint exercised by a dynamistic belief that kept men, under provocation, from slaying aged members of their family; they feared the curse which like dreaded Furies they were sure would dog their steps till they were overtaken. Persuade them that this restraint is only a figment of the imagination and that only the gallows awaits the murderer and a weaker sanction is substituted for a stronger; the murderer may hope by luck or by cunning to escape the gallows; he could not in any way whatever escape the effect of the curse. Such imagination beliefs have hitherto largely supplied the element of cohesion in their society; delusions have preserved order. We may well ask: If civilization ruthlessly rends the fabric upon which native society is built, how shall we sustain the edifice?

## 2. *The Future of the Bantu Race*

The Bantu are not likely to die out. They should develop industrially and intellectually, for they have that in them which should carry them far. But what if they gain in this way and lose their soul, by being left without religion and moral sanctions? They will gain nothing and the world will gain a new problem,—the problem of fifty millions of educated, industrialized blacks with no moral restraints beyond the laws imposed upon them by alien nations. The black man with a thin veneer of civilization and without religious faith is a dangerous person. The greatest disaster that could befall the Bantu would be a secular scientific education. They may become Mohammedans, as many of them already have, but can Christian America and Europe regard with equanimity the prospect of such a tremendous accession to Moslem power? In some respects, undoubtedly, the Bantu would gain by such conversion, but would it be the best thing for them? Or, lastly, they may become Christians. That is the best thing, the writer is convinced, that can happen to them.

## 3. *What Christianity will do for the Bantu*

(a) *It will Make Them Sure of God.*—Not merely will it reveal Him as the God of Nature, but as the source and sanction of moral law, the impersonation of righteousness and love; in a word, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(b) *It will Moralize Their Whole Life.*—It will substitute the eternal moral law for the evanescent, altogether inadequate, tribal morality, and will give an incentive to higher living, purifying away the actual foul condition of things. There is no use in mincing words here. Some people used to have the idea, and perhaps still have it,

that the "primitive savage" was an innocent creature, until the wicked white man came along and taught him the vices of civilization. As a matter of fact, the depraved white man has nothing to teach the pagan that he does not already know. Many of the Bantu tribes were actually on the way to extinction through their beastly immorality, when the missionaries first came among them. That great authority on Africa, Sir Harry Johnston, has recently written: "In some writings on Africa, missionary work is still sneered at; but one result—especially in South and East Africa—has been to raise the birth-rate among the negroes by discouraging polygamy, and above all by strenuously urging the abolition of the depraving initiation ceremonies and of all immodest behavior among young girls and boys." There is nothing whatever in Bantu religion as it exists today that can better the moral state of the people. They need the absolute imperatives and the moral ideals that Christianity brings.

(c) *It will Liberate Them from Their Fears.*—Christianity will convince them of the friendliness of the universe and set them free to develop whatever of good there is in them. The fear, which we have seen characterizes them at present, paralyzes all effort. A man simply dare not make himself conspicuous. To raise his head above his fellows is but to give the signal for his own destruction. There are, no doubt, other causes for the African's unprogressiveness, but not the least in importance of these causes is this fear that freezes all initiative. Set the African free from that fear, let him once stand up upon his feet and look out upon earth and heaven with confidence, and he will mount. And what can give that confidence and hopefulness like the religion of Jesus Christ?

(d) *It will Make for a Healthy and Progressive Individuality.*—It will develop the sense of the individual, as

against corporate responsibility. A pagan Bantu hardly realizes his own personality. A man is a member of a clan, of a tribe, of a family, and as such shares responsibility and privilege with others. Social bonds of this kind are a good thing, but they are not altogether good, when they prevent the growth of individual responsibility. A man does not think for himself; he has no sense of being accountable for his actions except to members of his own group. Under present conditions he leaves his home for a long period of service at some distant mine and on his return all his savings are taken by lazy fellows who remained at home and who by clan-rights have a claim upon his possessions. Men will not long endure such communism. They will inevitably become individualists. The necessary evolution is not without its perils; Christianity will step in to give a sense of responsibility to the individualist, and will preserve what is best in the clan system,—the brotherliness, the corporate feeling and the sense of obligation to the common good.

“The pagan African,” says one well-informed writer, “is what he is because of his religion.” Give him a new religion, a real, vital, enlightened religion, and he will be a new man. Christianity will save him, because it will enter into every relation of his life to give it restraint and uplift; nothing else can.

If it seems to any reader that the argument has been conducted on the utilitarian principle that religion is useful to the magistrate, the writer can only say that he is far from believing that the Bantu must be evangelized in order to make them more useful men and to prevent them from becoming a peril to the world. The black man, too, is God’s child, and has the same inherent right with ourselves to know of the Heavenly Father’s will and love.

#### 4. *The Acquisition of Experience by the Friendly Student of the Bantu*

While the general public will be interested by this frank interpretation of Bantu life and thought, the book will come also into the hands of young men and women who intend to go as missionaries to Africa. This fact makes appropriate certain bits of advice which grow out of active missionary experience.

(a) *Take Pains to Understand the Viewpoint of the People.*—One who comes into close relations with these fine, virile Africans will discover that, while they are religious at heart, they look at many things from an angle wholly foreign to an Anglo-Saxon. If the missionary or the publicist is to get at their inner motives and ideals, he must give them most careful study.

(b) *Cultivate Friendly Relations with Them.*—The young missionary must not fail to make a close, direct study of the social and religious customs and ideas of the people. This he cannot do satisfactorily from books, however well written. Nor can he get them properly from converts to Christianity. He will be well advised to make friends with the rankest old pagan he can find, sitting at his feet and absorbing his point of view. When such a man's confidence has been gained, he will talk freely. His mental vigor will surprise the novice and afford him a very precious grasp of the native mind. The Bantu are not simpletons; the more a missionary penetrates their minds, the more he respects them as a race.

(c) *Master the Language of the People.*—It goes without saying that before this advice can be carried out the missionary must have secured an adequate knowledge of the language. He should be very cautious in accepting any information about the people's beliefs that comes to

him through the medium of English. It is so fatally easy when expressing African conceptions in one's own tongue to confound the sense of words. For instance, one may be told that the Bantu believe in a "soul," but it would not do to leap to the conclusion that their ideas of the soul are identical with our own. A real knowledge of the language will help to avoid such pitfalls. The missionary keen on his work will not be content with gaining a smattering of the language. He must know it so thoroughly as to be able to follow every ramification of African thought. He should aim at attaining such proficiency that the people will recognize him among themselves as a leading authority on it. He should know it better even than any of them do. Language, it has been well said, is a temple which enshrines the soul of a people. No time and no effort must be begrudged by the young missionary in penetrating to that sacred enclosure by a diligent study of the native language. And experience proves that unless he resolutely sets about the task in the early days of his service, before he is ensnared in the routine of his ministry, he is very unlikely ever to reach the goal.

(*d*) *Cultivate Tact and Patience.*—It should be noted that great tact is needed in securing reliable information from the natives. As every investigator knows, direct questioning is worse than useless unless and until intimate relations have been established. The people will resent inquisitiveness and will probably answer falsely. Infinite tact and perseverance are required for successful progress.

(*e*) *Make Accurate and Full Records.*—When information is gained in this way, the young missionary should lose no time in making note of it. The value to himself and to others of his studies at first hand will be in direct proportion to the accuracy, fullness and preciseness of his

record. The missionary should treat this part of his work—and wherever a missionary finds himself among people who have not been thoroughly studied he should regard this study as part of his work—with the same painstaking care that a chemist bestows upon a scientific investigation.

(f) *Treat Local Customs and Ideas with Respect.*—The novice should treat the religious ideas of his people seriously with no air of superciliousness. It should be unnecessary to suggest that he should make all his inquiries in the spirit of the physician who studies anatomy and physiology, in order that he may help and heal, not at all in the spirit of the ghoulish who studies the same things so that he may best be in a position to harm and destroy. It is best for the young missionary to refrain from any hypercritical attitude, until he has established himself as a friend and as an authority on native language and custom. No one should presume to denounce a custom, however evil it may seem to be, until it has been thoroughly grasped in all its bearings. Even then, the separation of the false elements from the true is better than sweeping condemnation, for upon the true elements one can build.

(g) *Seek for Points of Contact.*—The young missionary should be ever on the lookout for pegs in primitive social and religious experience on which to hang the new and better conceptions which Christianity offers. We seek for these points of contact, and we do well; but when all is said, the fact remains that there is no point of contact like the warm human touch. When the missionary meets the people as men and women, when he learns to trust and love them, they respond. If he goes to them as a being from another planet, is distant and aloof from them, they will close up like a sensitive plant under one's finger. They may pay him deference because he is a

white man and a missionary; they will not open their hearts to him as confidant and friend.

(h) *In Conclusion.*—The sum of the whole matter is this: One who longs to lead a people to God must win their confidence and deserve their affection and respect. When they are shown by such teachers the Christ in all the fullness and glory of His personality, they too will readily yield Him the frankincense of a loyal devotion. Missionary experience repeatedly has proven that the Christian message touches the heart of every human being. The backward peoples, once they understand it, will be quick to accept the simple faith in Christ Jesus.



## APPENDIX I

### HINTS FOR PRELIMINARY READING OR STUDY ABOUT PRIMITIVE RELIGIONS

No amount of reading about a primitive religion can ever take the place of a direct, friendly contact with the people to whom it is a real religious experience, or of a study of their religious ideas and practices on the ground. Nevertheless, the one who plans to go as a student or as a missionary to Africa or to the island world or to any region where animistic influences predominate should use every feasible means for gaining a preliminary knowledge of such areas, of their peoples and of the prevailing type of religious life.

First of all may well be the reading of some simple introduction to primitive religions, such as the proper chapter in Barton's *Religions of the World* (No. 1)<sup>1</sup> or Soper's even more recent volume (No. 24). The American or Canadian student who wishes to go more deeply into detail may consult Toy's *Introduction to the History of Religion* (No. 25). One or two volumes may be mentioned which give attention to the general problems of primitive religion, such as Marett's *The Threshold of Religion* (No. 16).

A student going to Malaysia or southeastern Asia or to Melanesia may profitably read Warneck's famous book entitled in the American edition *The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism*, but known in England under the title *The Living Forces of the Gospel*. It is a psychological study of animism in the Indian archipelago based upon the writer's experience as a missionary.

The student going to any part of Africa may be advised to read on general principles such books as Fraser's *Winning of Primitive People* (No. 5) and Dennett's *At the Back of*

<sup>1</sup> See the bibliography following.

*the Black Man's Mind* (No. 4). He should also read one of the monographs referred to in the following bibliography, the one most closely relating to the region which he is to enter. Such a thoughtful reading with a following up of perplexing statements by a reading of the articles in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (No. 6) will go far toward introducing the young missionary to the religious ideas of his people.

## APPENDIX II

### A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. BARTON, GEORGE A. *Religions of the World*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1920. A singularly clear introduction to the various religions, including living faiths.
2. BENTLEY, W. H. *Pioneering on the Congo*. 2 vols. New York, Revell, 1900. By an early but trustworthy writer. Volume I contains an important discussion about "the knowledge of God and fetichism." See also Vol. II, Appendix 2.
3. CALLAWAY, H. *The Religious System of the Amazulu*. London, Trübner, 1870. Incomplete and rare, but of great value, containing Zulu texts with English translations. The most valuable sections discuss "Unkulunkulu," pp. 1-104; "Ancestor Worship," pp. 130-227; "Diviners," pp. 259-274; "Medical Magic and Witchcraft," pp. 417-448.
4. DENNETT, R. E. *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*. New York, Macmillan, 1909. To be read with great discrimination. Important, however, for the exposition of Nyambe (Nzambi is Dennett's spelling), Nbongoism and Nkiciism. Unfortunately, a book which confuses a beginner.
5. FRASER, DONALD. *Winning a Primitive People*. New York, Dutton, 1914. An interesting book which contains a good chapter on the religion of the Tambuka of British Central Africa.

6. HASTINGS, J. (editor). *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*. New York, Scribner. This important publication contains many general articles and some special articles of great value to the student of primitive religion. The most important of these are:

Vol. I—*Africa*, by A. H. Keane.

*Ancestor Worship and Cult of the Dead*.  
(*Introduction*), by W. Crooke.

Vol. II—*Bantu and South Africa*, by E. S. Hartland.

Vol. IV—*Death and Disposal of the Dead* (*Introductory and Primitive*), by E. S. Hartland.

*Demons and Spirits* (*Introductory*), by  
L. H. Gray.

Vol. V—*Ethics* (*Rudimentary*), by R. R. Marett.  
*Fetishism* (*Introductory*), by W. G. Aston.

Vol. VI—*God* (*Primitive and Savage*), by A. Lang.

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*Negroes and West Africa*, by A. F. Mockler-Ferryman.

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Vol. X—*Religion*, by Stanley A. Cook.

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*Tutelary Gods*, by E. O. James.

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9. JOHNSTON, Sir H. H. *George Grenfell and the Congo*. 2 vols. London, Hutchinson, 1908. Sir Harry Johnston is a prolific writer on Africa. As a British administrator he has had a peculiarly valuable experience in various sections of Africa and ranks high as an anthropologist and ethnologist. One who wishes to know Africa in general will be well advised to read *The Uganda Protectorate*, 1902, and *British Central Africa*, 1897, or any other available volumes by him.
10. JUNOD, H. A. *The Life of a South African Tribe*. New York, Macmillan, 1912-13. A valuable study of the Thonga people of Portuguese East Africa by a painstaking and scholarly missionary investigator. In Vol. II, Part VI, is a very full description of their religious beliefs.
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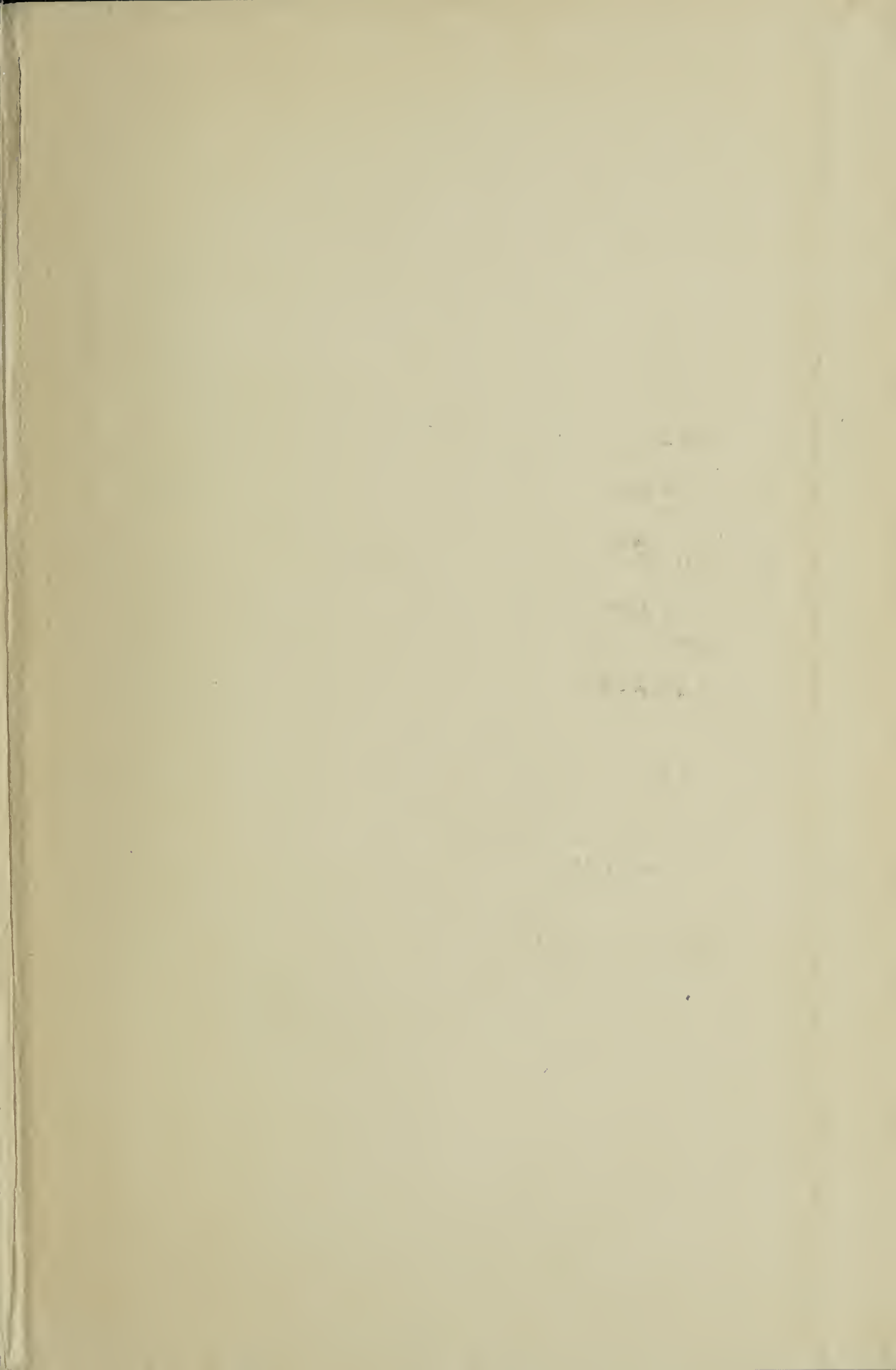






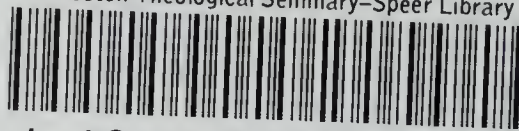
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